RHODA.

A NOVEL.

VOL. II. PART II.

RHODA.

A NOVEL

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THINGS BY THEIR RIGHT NAMES;"

AND "PLAIN SENSE."

"I teach the useful science to be good." *Pope.*

"Pour réussir par les ouvrages d'imagination, il faut peut-être, présenter une morale facile au milieu des mœurs sévères; mais au milieu des mœurs corrumpues le tableau d'une morale austere est le seul qu'il faille constamment offrir."

Staël, de la Litterature.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

PART II.

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RHODA.

CHAP. I.

> ———————"Beware!
> From the chaf'd tyger rend the prey,
> Rush on the lion when at bay,
> Bar the fell dragon's blighted way;—
> But shun that lovely snare!"
>
> *The Bridal of Triarmain.*

THE moment arrived!—The whole house assumed another aspect. It seemed the Temple of Pleasure, and of Taste. The splendour—the perfume—the form of the ornaments—the contrast, and the harmony of the colour, rendered it worthy of the divinity who had presided at its erection, and who now moved through its fairy apartments, with the bloom of a Hebe, and the lightness of a Sylph!

[illegible] had complimented the taste of [illegible] Strickland, by the expensiveness [illegible] dress, and had consulted her own, in its simplicity.

The eye of the connoisseur could appreciate the fineness of the materials of which it was composed, while to that of the more common observer, the effect only appeared. Here was no competition between splendour and beauty; and Rhoda, in bearing away the palm of superior charms, seemed to owe the triumph only to the beneficent hand of Nature.

Sir James Osbourne found her irresistible; but was still willing to impute her power over him, more to the graces of her mind, than to the attractions of her person.

"After all my caution—after all my deliberation, I cannot be such a fool, as to be caught wholly by beauty, even such as her's!—The countenance is but the mirror of the mind;—it is that which I love. I have long seen her

above the meanness of design:—who, indeed, that looks upon her open brow, could believe her capable of it? I now behold, in the plainness of her dress, even on this night of gala, that dignity of feeling, which disdains to enter into a frivolous competition of ornament with superiority of fortune: and does not every lineament in her face, and every movement of her form, give sign of this dignity, which thus she proves? Where the 'mind so truly keeps the promise of the face,' of what should I be afraid—of what should I doubt?"

Such were the cogitations of Sir James, as he followed with his eye every movement of Rhoda. Mrs. Strictland saw the happy moment. "Now," thought she, "a little adroitness on my part, and the thing is done." She was, however, too able a general, to put her enemy on his defence, by giving him any intimation of his danger. Apparently without design, and as busied with every one, and any one but himself, she

never lost sight of him,—never was a moment from his side.

Rhoda was dancing with all the spirit and gaiety that youth, and a consciousness of universal admiration could inspire, when Sir James exclaimed,

" What unaffected gaiety!—What graceful vivacity!"

The opportunity was auspicious. Mrs. Strictland did not neglect it.

" She is, indeed, the very goddess Thalia herself," said she, resting her hand gently on Sir James's arm. " I can look at no other object; and yet this is only the cheerfulness of good spirits, and good humour. If you would see the gaiety of the heart, you must see her in our domestic circle;—see her when she makes for Mr. Strictland and myself, a perpetual feast. I might add, a feast for herself too, for home is her natural element; and much as she seems to enjoy herself in these public exhibitions, you cannot guess what difficulty I sometimes have, to induce her to take

a share in them. She does so beg and intreat for *a day* to ourselves, that we may be *happy*, as she expresses it; in a crowd, she says, at best, we can only be amused."

The movement of the dance, at this instant, brought Rhoda near enough to enable her ear to catch a few words of this machinating language. She disdained the purpose for which she knew that it was uttered; and her flexible and intelligent countenance shewed the displeasure that it gave her. The change did not escape Mrs. Strictland.—

"See," said this able politician, "a proof of what I say. See how the heart prevails over the spirits! That passing cloud, I know as well as if I heard her speak, was caused by seeing some one less happy than herself; or by thinking that some of her companions wished for what she possessed. Yes, yes—See how perfectly I am in the right!—That beautiful *camellia Japonica*, which only this morning was sent her by a friend, and

which she thought of wearing this evening, with so much delight—the only ornament, indeed, that I could prevail with her to wear; for, she says, 'you know, that I have no right to ornaments:'—That beautiful *camellia Japonica*, you see, she has just given to Lady Harriet Delamaine, whose eye I have seen fixed upon it for the last five minutes;—and now that angelic countenance has resumed all its gaiety. It must, indeed, be allowed, that she may well dispense with extraneous ornaments: the sentiment that makes her resign it, contributes more to her adornment, than a thousand *camellia Japonicas.*"

"Miss Strictland is too dangerously perfect," said Sir James, with a sigh, "unless she will add to all her other perfections, the attribute of mercy."

As he said this, he approached Rhoda for the purpose of securing her hand for the next two dances, with a determination to retain it through life, if he could discover that the heart, which he was

convinced was superior to every mercenary feeling, could be secured his own, by the honourable tie of affection.

Mrs. Strictland, aware that her work was done, mingled with her company with more than her usual meekness, suavity, and complacence; for these qualities extended on this evening, even to Lady Belmont. She said to her, as she passed, "How lovely is Lady Herriet to-night!—She is the brightest star here!" With the same subdued modesty, she received the compliments poured from every mouth on the charms of Rhoda, and at the same time, with an acknowledgment of sentimental partiality for the object of them. "How well you know the way to my heart," said she to one; "How sweetly you flatter me!"—To another, "It would be in vain to deny that I love her to folly."—To a third, "Ah, I see that you rally me!"—To a fourth, "But if, *indeed*, her soul *could* shine through her eyes,

you would acknowledge that you are not guilty of exaggeration."

Rhoda, wholly unconscious of all these prettinesses to which she gave occasion, was this night more than usually disengaged from every serious thought—from every retrospective restraint—from every future calculation. Her fancy—her heart—her soul were in the present moment; her eyes swam in joy, or sparkled with intelligence: she trod on air, and appeared like a being of another world, descended, with all the pleasures in her train, to bless the inhabitants of this.

Fascinating, and gracious in her manners to all, her quick eye rested not on any individual for a moment. Not even Lord William St. Quintin could for an instant retain her notice; and when Sir James Osbourne solicited the honour of her hand, she had almost forgotten that there was such a person in existence.

But her returning recollection was

strong and oppressive.—As he poured upon her awakened attention the feelings of his soul—as he painted his admiration, his love, his devotion,—as he laid at her feet his rank, his fortune, and himself; Rhoda's gaiety fled.---The past and the future rushed upon her mind---the brightness of distinction—and the shadows of obscurity were before her.—Her choice was now to be made—and while her heart declared for Mr. Ponsonby, her vanity clung to Sir James.

But how was it possible to give utterance to one single thought of the many that now crowded on Rhoda's feelings, and confounded her understanding!

Composed---silent---unknowing what she did, she arose, and was walking away, inattentive to and unconscious of the impression that a manner, so strange and embarrassed, must have upon Sir James.

He retained her for a moment by the hand.

"Propitious be your silence, my dear Miss Strictland!" said he: "you will give me leave to-morrow to repeat to Mr. and Mrs. Strictland, all that I have presumed to say to you to-night?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Rhoda, hastily. "I must have time, I must think! --Is this a place---is this a moment?"

"I acknowledge that I deserve the reproach," said Sir James; "but my destiny seemed to hang upon an instant. I dreaded anticipation from every one who approached you.---If I am so happy as not to have been anticipated; if I may hope that the heart to which I now address my pleadings is not another's; you shall determine my every future step.---You have nothing of precipitation to dread from me."

"I cannot hear you farther," said Rhoda; "I *must not*,"—and darting from him, she mingled with the thickest of the crowd, seeming to implore protection from all around her.

Sir James knew not whether to augur good or evil from what had passed;—if the gravity, the silence, the blushes, with which he had been heard, were grounds on which to found his most anxious hopes, the words,—" I cannot hear you farther—I *must not*"— sounded in his ears like the knell of all that he had dared to aspire to. The scene, which had taken place on the last night of his residence at Overleigh Park, returned to his recollection; he thought that he saw, in the favoured acquaintance which had there appeared, the object of the dreaded prepossession.

The eager and earnest no! no!—to his intention of applying to Mr. and Mrs. Strictland, seemed to speak the fear of a controul on their part, from which the heart of Rhoda shrunk; and, if the qualifying terms, " I must think," —" I must have time;"—seemed to imply that she might ultimately be prevailed upon to listen to him, what love was ever satisfied with a compli-

ance, that was yielded to any persuasion but his own?

Sir. James had passed the rubicon, and success was now not less essential to the gratification of his pride, than to the softer feelings of his heart. He, therefore, followed Rhoda; and gently reminding her that she had fulfilled but half her engagement, led her, without any signs of reluctance on her part, again into the dance.

But Rhoda was no longer the vivifying principle of the surrounding multitude.—Silent—absorbed—but gentle and complacent, Sir James had at least the satisfaction of observing that what he had said to her, engaged her wholly, and that it could not mortally have offended her.—He wished not to increase her embarrassment, which was already more obvious to those around them than he would have chosen. He, therefore, talked upon any subject but that which was uppermost in his own and Rhoda's mind; and by these means,

though he could not restore her gaiety to Rhoda, he did in part recal her attention to the scene by which she was surrounded. Mrs. Strictland did this still more effectually, a few moments afterwards. She had observed every motion, every change in Sir James's countenance, and wanted not the evidence of her ears to be assured that the irrevocable words had been uttered; but she was amazed and confounded by the effect they had had upon Rhoda.—She could not have believed it possible, that any girl, who had been in the world, even as short a time as Miss Strictland, should not have been sufficiently mistress of herself better to have concealed her feelings.—She was absolutely shocked with such a mark of rusticity and nature; and felt the triumphs of the evening faded by the manner in which they had been received by Rhoda.—Nor did she quite understand the feelings that had been betrayed. Something of the real truth

struck upon her mind, but as she could not suffer herself to doubt the final result, her present care was to remedy, to the best of her power, the awkwardness of which Rhoda had been guilty.

Gliding towards her, she said,—"I know, my dear, every word that has passed—but don't let every individual know it."

"Madam!" said Rhoda.

"Don't let it be supposed, that you are so surprised and so delighted with Sir James's proposals, as to be incapable of thinking on any thing else."

"Whoever thinks that delight is the cause of my abstraction," replied Rhoda, "is very much mistaken."

But the very supposition that such a mistake could be made, roused her pride; and she recovered, if not wholly to what she had been during the earlier part of the evening, yet to so much of her usual self, as to make the change, to all who were not aware of the scene which had passed with Sir James, im-

putable only to the exhaustion of spirits too vigorously exerted. Lord William St. Quintin was not, however, of this number—he had too lively an interest in the game that was playing, not scrutinizingly to watch all the turns of it.

Approaching Rhoda with an air of kindness and interest:

" I am not going," said he, " to repeat what you must have heard so often to-night, as to be wearied with it, but let me take the privilege of a real friend, to be one of the first to congratulate you on such a tribute to your charms, as although very inadequate to their value, will stamp a currency upon them, which will secure their acknowledgment whenever they appear."

Rhoda blushed from pride, rather than from gratified vanity—but the state of irresolution and uncertainty, in which her mind then was, prevented her from making any answer.

" I know this is not the language of flattery," resumed Lord William, with

the tone of the utmost simplicity and sincerity; "but it is the tone of friendship and of reason.—The richest jewel in the eye of the vulgar often owes half its merit to its setting—and what, my dear Miss Strictland, is the human race in general, high and low, but the vulgar?—You must allow me to rejoice that there can be no eye *now*, that will dispute the brilliancy of the gem."

Mortified and embarrassed, Rhoda had no power to rally Lord William on the unusual tone of sentiment and reason which he had assumed; and neither willing to deny nor to affirm that there were grounds for his congratulations, she abruptly said,

"You don't dance to night, Lord William?"

"You know I never dance but with you," replied he in a tone of the most partial affection; "and I could not presume, on this night of gala and triumph, to offer you the hand of a person, so *sans* consequence as myself."

"I wish you would dance with me now," said Rhoda; not adverting at the moment to how fully such a request established the fact to which Lord William had been alluding, and thinking only how she should escape from the restraint of any further intercourse with Sir James.

"Now and ever!" said Lord William, taking the fair hand that was held out to him, while there was "a laughing devil in his eye," that would have spoken volumes to Rhoda, had she been sufficiently disengaged from her own thoughts to have taken notice of it.

As Lord William led Rhoda to her place, they passed Sir James.

"You see, Sir James," said Lord William, with a shrug of his shoulders; "what I am come to—a kind of chaperoning grand-papa, whom young ladies invite to dance with them, just to fill up the interval, that they may not give to their real favourite."

Sir James smiled:—Rhoda blushed

the deepest crimson, for she felt all the consequences of what she had done.

"Upon my word, Lord William," said she very gravely, "you put the strongest and most unfounded constructions upon the actions of your acquaintance I ever met with—and I assure you," added she, with warmth, "you are this time mistaken *in toto*."

"Oh, yes! I see I am," replied Lord William; "and what so easy as to persuade my vanity that you asked me to dance with you, because you preferred my conversation to that of every other man in the room?"

Rhoda vexed, yet half inclined to laugh at the scrape which she now saw she was in, said only,

"You are very provoking—but without admitting your first conclusion, your vanity need not plume itself upon a distinction, which after all, may be only the avoidance of one, rather than the preference of another.

"Sir James," replied Lord William,

drily; "looks like a rejected and avoided lover."

Rhoda, finding that all her attempts to extricate herself, only served to involve her deeper, seemed not to hear the last words, but called Lord William's attention to the dance, and put an end to the conversation.

"Now," said Lord William, when the second dance was over, "you ought to make me your best courtesy, and thank me—but here comes Sir James to claim you, and he will do it for you."

"I assure you," said Rhoda, "Sir James has no authority to pay my debts—nor any allowed claim upon me whatever—you are perfectly mistaken in all you think and say."

"I am peculiarly unfortunate," said Lord William, with a careless air and languid tone; "but I am the man in the world the most apt to be mistaken—Every body knows that."

Sir James at this moment joined them, and asked Rhoda to dance.

" You must excuse me—I beg you will excuse me," said Rhoda.

" Oh pray don't excuse her, Sir James," said Lord William. " It is quite in rule, I assure you," said he to Rhoda: " nobody will think it the least strange or any way wrong, take my word for it." And so saying, he sauntered from them, with an air of the most perfect indifference.

" I wonder," said Rhoda, " what it is that makes Lord William, with so much cool impertinence, so universal a favourite?"

" I did not know that he was an universal favourite," said Sir James.

" I am told he is," said Rhoda, as she turned to go away.

" You will not leave me?" said Sir James, " you will dance with me?"

" If you will draw no consequences from my doing so," replied Rhoda, blushing, " I have no objection."

" I will do nothing but what you direct," said Sir James, retaining her

hand; and Rhoda, unknowing what she wished, and much less what she designed, suffered him to lead her into the dance.

"Not *always* perfectly mistaken in all I think and say!" said Lord William with a saucy smile, as she passed near him.

"Lord William is quite intolerable to-night," said Rhoda. "I shall certainly hate him if he goes on so."

"He is not worthy of your hatred," said Sir James; "it would give him too much consequence."

"I am sure that he is of none to me," said Rhoda; and the calm manner, in which she uttered these words, gave the most sincere pleasure to the heart of Sir James.

From this moment, Sir James never quitted the side of Rhoda for the remainder of the evening; and though she suffered him not, even by allusion, to renew the subject next his heart, the gentleness and complacency, with which

she listened to him upon every other, justified his hope that her objection was more to the time than the matter.

" I desire," she had said, " that my mind may be left free enough to attend to the calls around me."

Sir James lingered, one of the last in the thinning apartments; and when finally the moment came that he too must go, his very adieus were made even to Mrs. Strictland in so pointed a manner, as to bespeak his expectation, that it would not be long before he should be regarded as a member of the family.—Mrs. Strictland scarcely waited for the disappearance of the shadow of the last departing guest, before she threw her arms around Rhoda.

" Now, my dear, you will believe me when I prophesy.—Did I not always tell you, that you might be whatever you wished to be?"

" I fear," replied Rhoda, " that I shall be nothing that I wish to be."

" My dear!" said Mrs. Strictland,

with a feeling of astonishment that made her doubt her senses.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Strictland, do pray indulge me," said Rhoda, the tears filling her eyes.—"I cannot talk to-night. I am so wearied—so exhausted—so depressed;" and she covered her face with her handkerchief to hide the emotion which she could not controul.

"All this is so wonderful—so extraordinary!" said Mrs. Strictland. "Only answer me one question, has not Sir James offered you his hand?"

"Oh, yes!—I believe so," said Rhoda; "but I cannot think—I cannot talk.—I would not go through such another night for the universe, and half its mischiefs are yet to come!"

"This is quite unintelligible!" said Mrs. Strictland; "but I will plague you no more to-night—you will see things quite in a different light in the morning.—But remember, Rhoda,

"This is the day,
Makes you, or mars you, for ever and aye."

"Too true!" thought Rhoda; and with the full weight of discomposed thought, which this reflection brought with it, she retired to her chamber.

CHAP. II.

———" Thou would'st be great,
Art not without ambition, but without what should attend it."
" Woulds't not play false, and yet would wrongly win."

Shakespeare.

Here, wearied as she was both in body and mind, she thought of nothing so little as rest. Except indeed by the sensation of wretchedness, she was scarcely conscious of existence—nor is the expression too strong for the fact.—Rhoda was at this moment as miserable, with all that is supposed to constitute the happiness of life within her grasp, as she could have been under the deprivation of. its meanest and most indispensable comforts.

Could she once have said, "get thee behind me, Satan! I will adhere to the dictates of my integrity, and the vows of my heart"—the spell would have been dissolved!—she would at once have been reconciled to herself, and been happy!—But the effort was too powerful for a mind, which she had suffered to be weakened by the underminings of vanity, and a growing taste for the effeminacies of life.

The thoughts which floated in her mind, and which she neither dared to embody in words, nor even to dwell upon sufficiently to comprehend distinctly what they meant, were composed of views of triumph—of splendor—of ease—of luxury—of beauty adorned and adorning—of talents praised and envied—of a name—a rank—a distinction in society, which she owed to her personal qualities alone: — all these pressed upon her feelings and bewildered her imagination.—She strove to drive them from her. "All this is nothing!"—

she *would* have said, but she could only faintly articulate, " all this *ought* to be nothing!—yet it is something to be able to make others happy---to do good to hundreds—to be virtuous and to be useful—to be loved and praised as is Lady Randolf"—thought she, with a somewhat lessening of the weight which had before oppressed her. " And how can I do all this in poverty—in obscurity?—I am, too, so unfitted for the station that was designed!—I should be unjust, injurious to give *him*, who deserves the best of wives, the worst—the worst in act, although not in intention. —For his own sake, I ought not to be his —I ought even to sacrifice my own happiness to this consideration—and perhaps I do!—I am not such a baby—I do not so little know the nothingness of all that the world can offer, to believe that this all can give happiness to its possessor—but it can communicate happiness to others, and can open so wide a field for the exercise of every virtue,

that surely those, who can possess themselves of such means, ought not lightly —for a fancy—perhaps a fleeting fancy —to reject them."

Rhoda would have been glad to have believed that she had enlisted virtue on the side of her wishes — but the deep sadness, the sense of self-degradation, which accompanied a conclusion she had meant not only to be consoling but exhilarating, might too feelingly have persuaded her, that there was some weak link in the chain of her reasoning. —She had indeed omitted the first principle—she had forgotten that evil was not an allowed foundation for good!— yet with all her forgetfulness and all her sophistry, so powerfully did the clear voice of simple justice speak within, that she did not dare to ask herself, what her Frances would think—what Mr. Wyburg would say—or what the silence of Lady Randolf would infer. But the most fatal symptom of the morbid state, in which the mind of Rhoda was at this in-

stant, was the dread that she felt, lest a few hours should bring her information that Lady Randolf would be in town immediately. This event, which she had, not many days past, so ardently wished for, which she had so earnestly solicited, now appeared to be the thing in the world the least to be desired—yet she veiled so carefully from herself, the motive of this reluctance to meet her monitor, that she lost all the benefit which might have been derived from the conviction that those, who fear an assisting hand, are willing to fall.

"I ought," thought she, "to determine this matter for myself---the decision is for life---and if it were to be made from any motive that does not spring from the knowledge I have of my own tastes and inclinations, it most infallibly drew after it repentance. I will think for myself--I will determine for myself—the praise or the blame of the decision ought to be all my own;

as, most assuredly will be the success, or the disappointment."

But Rhoda could not think—much less could she determine.

There were moments when the recollection of the friends of her youth and the delights of the days passed in their society; when the conviction that she felt of the truth and intenseness of Mr. Ponsonby's affection, and the taste which she had for his talents and his manners, bore down all before them;—when title—fortune—distinction---when the joy of being flattered, and the joy of being envied, shrunk to their true size, and appeared to be too contemptible for her notice---but the next instant they swelled again to a magnitude and importance which commanded all her reverence; and she felt that it was impossible to forego them.

In an alternation of these opposite thoughts and feelings, which confounded her reason and weakened her powers

of action, Rhoda passed those hours, which Mrs. Strictland had hoped would have been given to rest, and to such a renovation of animal spirits and taste for the pleasures of life, as would have left no hesitation in the mind of Rhoda as to the acceptance of the hand of Sir James Osbourne. Her dismay was proportionate to her disappointment, on the sight of the dejected and spiritless figure that Rhoda presented to her eyes when they met at a late breakfast. An appearance, so little consonant to the pleasure and triumph with which she had believed that the explicit declaration of Sir James must have filled the mind of her young friend, left Mrs. Strictland no doubt of the truth of what she had suspected the night before to be the real state of the case, and such a conviction immediately suggested to her politic mind, the best method to counteract the evil which she dreaded. She saw that this was no moment for explanation—much less for expostulation or reproach. An open at-

tack she was aware must be unsuccessful; but in the dejection and consciousness which the countenance and eye of Rhoda betrayed, she discovered she had an ally within, that by a little management might be led to deliver up the fortress at discretion.

"My dear Rhoda," said she, "I see that a few hours have not been sufficient to restore you quite to yourself.—I do not wonder at it; for, really, my love, you were gay to folly last night, but such folly as enchanted all beholders. Now you must pay the penalty—to-day you shall be still as a mouse—no talking—no thinking—no, my dear, nor any tea, if you please;"—displacing the teacup from before Rhoda, "it is not good for such shaken nerves."---Then speaking to the footman—"Pray bring some very strong coffee for Miss Strictland immediately.---A cup of coffee, my love, will restore you, and we will take a drive into the country---the air, the quiet, will make you quite well, and you

will be as gay and as blooming at Lady Belmont's this evening, as you were in the midst of our festivity last night!"

"Thank you, Madam," was all that Rhoda could utter, as she wiped the starting tear from her eye.

"Nothing could answer better, I think, than did all our arrangements," said Mrs. Strictland, endeavouring to engage Rhoda's attention—"I never saw rooms better decorated—I never saw attendance better arranged — refreshments more profuse nor more excellent. —I am sure I take no praise to myself for all this—forall that was to be referred to taste, I owe to you, my dear—indeed your spirit seemed to pervade the whole. —Our guests were collectively and individually, I thought, more than usually well dressed and well looking—all in honour of you, my dear; for it was fully understood that the *fête* was yours. Well, it must be acknowledged that there is a real and a moral pleasure in

making so many people happy, and in being the object of love and admiration to such a circle."

Rhoda sighed:—" If we drive out this morning," said she, " may we stop for a moment at Hopkinson's? I wish to have his bill."

" We will do exactly what you like, my love," said Mrs. Strictland; " but this morning, I wish you to be as quiet as possible, and to give your mind to nothing but agreeable images."

" I shall feel more at ease," said Rhoda, " when I have Hopkinson's bill."

" Then, my dear, we will call, and order him to send it immediately.—I dare say you have a very good reason for wishing to have it so suddenly."

Rhoda made no answer, but swallowed a cup of coffee, as if she had thought, that all the misery, which she felt, was the fault of unstrung nerves.

" I shall be quite ready to attend

you," said she, rising from the table, "whenever you chuse to order the carriage.

"It shall come to the door directly," said Mrs. Strictland.

Rhoda was impatient to be gone. She dreaded every moment the appearance of Sir James. She hoped for relief from change of place, and variety of objects. She had a vague notion, that her final resolves might have some dependance on the amount of the haberdasher's bill. She wanted, in a word, to run away from herself; and she felt as if she should have been thankful to any body who would have run away with her from London, never more to have returned.

Mrs. Strictland was a close and acute observer of all that was passing in Rhoda's mind. She saw that she could only hope, finally, to secure her prize, by giving at the present moment sufficient line. She burned with an eager curiosity, to know the real terms upon which Rhoda was with Sir James; nor

was she without a fear that there might be an absolute hostility towards him, in Rhoda's withdrawing herself from any visit intended on his part. She could have suppressed her curiosity, but she could not conquer her fear, and she ventured to say,

"I conclude, my dear, that you have no reason to expect Sir James Osbourne will call here this morning? If you have, we should give orders accordingly."

"Sir James Osbourne," replied Rhoda, "has no reason to expect that I should stay at home to receive his visit."

Mrs. Strictland felt her heart sink: but with well-dissembled ease, she replied,

"Oh, I dare say you understand each other. His love, and your good sense, my dear, must bring all things to a right issue."

Rhoda was silent; and Mrs. Strictland not daring to push her farther, and obliged to quit guard herself, found a mo-

ment in which to say apart to Mr. Strictland,

"If Sir James Osbourne calls this morning, pray be so kind as to see him, if possible; and just drop, as by accident, that Rhoda was obliged to go into the air this morning, but that we shall meet certainly at Lady Belmont's to-night."

"What does this mean?" said Mr. Strictland, peevishly. "What need of manœuvring, when the point is gained? Did you not tell me that Sir James had proposed to Rhoda last night? Why cannot we all go straight forwards to the marriage?"

"My dear Mr. Strictland," said Mrs. Strictland, in the most gracious tone imaginable, "we are going straight forward; but you must allow me to know which is the straight road. Rhoda is so nervous, and so fluttered, that she really would not be produceable to Sir James this morning. We must consider how

new she is to the world, and how formidable matrimony generally appears to country young ladies, who have not heard all the possibilities and chances of engaging every man, whether of their acquaintance or not, discussed and canvassed; but though they have not quite so much self-possession as those who are better trained to the habits of society, they understand their own interest quite as well, and can pursue it as pertinaciously."

"There is but one thing for Rhoda to do," said Mr. Strictland; "and that is to marry Sir James Osbourne directly. Could I believe that she was such a fool as to hesitate, I would send her into the country to-morrow."

"My dear Mr. Strictland, why should you suppose that she is such a fool?" returned Mrs. Strictland. "Make yourself perfectly easy: Rhoda will be Lady Osbourne; but really we must allow her to take her own methods of be-

coming so. Now, therefore, pray do see Sir James, if he calls, and tell him how matters really are."

"You rather mean, how matters are *not*, I suppose," said Mr. Strictland; "but I'll do my best."

Mrs. Strictland, having secured this out-work as well as she could, returned to Rhoda, and they went out in the carriage together.

CHAP. III.

"Still she delayed, unable to decide
Which was the master-passion, love, or pride."

Crabbe.

RHODA endeavoured to busy herself with the passing objects, and attempted something like conversation.—Mrs. Strictland gently followed her lead:—yet said, every now and then; "don't exhaust yourself, my dear,"—"don't say a word more than you like to say—I dispense with your being an agreeable companion this morning."

When they stopt at Hopkinson's, Rhoda seemed still more to rouse herself; and she said to the man, who came to receive her orders at the coach-door, with a steady voice; "pray, Sir, let my bill be written out immediately.—I beg it may be sent this evening."

The man bowed, and wondered. The carriage drove away, and Rhoda again fell into a reverie: Mrs. Strictland was on thorns.

"My dearest Rhoda," said she, "you must forgive a little spice of our mother Eve: I have really a great desire to know your motive for thus suddenly, and peremptorily calling in your bill. Poor Hopkinson will think that you are offended, and design to pay him off, and employ him no more: but you do not mean that, I am sure."

"If I knew what I *did* mean," said Rhoda, with much sadness of tone; "I would tell you, my dear Mrs. Strictland: —but indeed I do not."

Mrs. Strictland was afraid that, by pressing her closer, she might furnish her with a meaning not at all to her wishes; she therefore made no farther attempt to come at the truth, and contented herself with saying,

"Well, my dear, I dare say whatever you do will be right, and to your

own advantage, which is the only object of my solicitude."

Another melancholy "thank you, madam," was all that poor Rhoda had spirits to utter.

Having, however, passed the stones, the wider horizon, which opened to her vision, and the quieter scenes, with which she was surrounded, soothed the feelings, and raised the spirits of Rhoda. She began to regulate her ideas, to analyze her wishes, and to form resolutions; until, in the course of a long drive, if she had not recovered her peace of mind, she had, at least, resumed her composure. "I will think of it no more to-day," said she to herself. "To-night I will be gay, if I cannot be happy;—to-morrow I will take my resolution."

As this thought passed through her mind, the carriage stopped for a moment at the door of a shop in Pall-Mall; and the eyes of Rhoda met those of Mr. Ponsonby!

With the eager step of assured wel-

come, he was instantly at the door of the carriage:—

"I have left my card two hours ago, in Grosvenor-square," said he. "How fortunate to meet you, when I had lost all hopes of seeing you to-day!"

"Heavens and earth!" said Rhoda; and covering her face with her hands, she threw herself, with a sudden motion, behind Mrs. Strictland, who was at this moment bending forward to the side of the carriage at which Mr. Ponsonby stood.

Mrs. Strictland, with her usual adroitness, aided her escape, by immediately filling the place which she had quitted.

"Miss Strictland is very unwell, my dear sir," said she to Mr. Ponsonby. "I am sure you will excuse us.—Drive on!"

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" said Rhoda, throwing her arms round Mrs. Strictland's neck. "Another glance would have killed me!"

"Compose yourself, my dear love,"

said Mrs. Strictland. "You have no cause for these flutters. All you think —all that you intend to do, is right."

"Right!" said Rhoda, with the tone of deep despair.

"Pray, my dear, keep yourself quiet," said Mrs. Strictland. "I had not a conception that you had such weak nerves. I shall not give another ball in a hurry, if these are to be the effects."

A deep-drawn sigh was the only answer that Rhoda could return; and Mrs. Strictland thought it prudent not to interrupt the unbroken silence which she seemed resolved to maintain, during the short remainder of their drive.

Rhoda went immediately to her own room, in a state of mind little short of derangement of intellect. She felt that the die was cast; and that her fate was determined, without having been submitted to a calm deliberation. Without choice, she had decided the question on which depended the happiness of her life, and the integrity of her character.

She was worthless, in her own eyes;—she felt that she must be worthless in the estimation of Mr. Ponsonby.

"He would reject me!" cried she, in an agony, "could he know all that has passed in this fluctuating heart, during the last twenty-four hours!—and he does know it. I have told him. He could not misunderstand me; — and could I even settle my thoughts, as they ought to be settled, how should I redeem his good opinion?—He will hate, he will despise me—and I deserve that he should hate and despise me!—Oh, undone, degraded Rhoda!—But could I recover his love—could I re-establish myself in his esteem, should I then have a plain path before me?—Should I then know what I would do?—Would his love, his esteem, indemnify me for——"

Rhoda was ashamed to say for *what!* She durst think no farther; and she remained still, and almost stupefied, with-

out the power of reflection, or motion.—She was roused from this state, by a summons to dinner.

"I cannot come to dinner," said she. "I cannot eat, Wilson. I know Mrs. Strictland will excuse me."

Wilson looked very inquisitive.—"Dear ma'am——" she began.

"Pray, give my love to Mrs. Strictland," said Rhoda, "and say that I could not eat a morsel, if I were to go down stairs. I will lie down—perhaps I shall be better presently."

"Let me assist you, madam," said the officiously-civil Wilson.

"No, no," said Rhoda, impatiently. "Give my message to Mrs. Strictland: it is all I want."

Rhoda's message brought up Mrs. Strictland.

"My dear love," said she, "I am quite alarmed. Wilson tells me that you are very ill."

"I am not well," said Rhoda, faintly.

"Perhaps laying down my head will still these beatings," pressing her hand to her forehead.

"All merely nervous, my love," said Mrs. Strictland. "I will send Wilson with some camphor-julep: drink a large glass-full. Lie down;—I dare say you will drop asleep; and when you awake, I have no doubt but you will be able to dress for Lady Belmont's. You must, if possible, shew yourself there to-night."

"It will be *impossible!*" said Rhoda. "You must excuse me: indeed you must excuse me. Such an exhibition would madden me quite!"

"Well, my dear, keep yourself still: that is all I require. You shall not do any thing that you don't like."

Away went Mrs. Strictland; and the assiduous Wilson attending with the camphor-julep, Rhoda drank the quantity prescribed, and having bound her head tightly up, she threw herself upon her bed, and abandoned herself to that

vicissitude of conflicting thoughts, which the honesty of her feelings, and the power of her ill-governed fancy, exposed her to.

Mrs. Strictland, *téte-à-tête* with Mr. Strictland, eagerly enquired whether he had seen Sir James Osbourne; and had the satisfaction to hear, that they had passed an hour together.

"Well?" said Mrs. Strictland.

"Well!" repeated Mr. Strictland, contemptuously; "there is nothing extraordinary to tell—nothing but what you know. Sir James wants to marry Rhoda; and does not seem to fear a refusal."

"Well, but my dear Mr. Strictland, was Sir James chagrined not to find Rhoda at home? Did he seem to think it strange? Was he disappointed?"

"Oh, disappointed, of course; but I did not see that he thought any thing strange. He talked of Rhoda's delicacy—of the dignity of her mind—of the high value which she ought to set

upon herself—of its being presumptuous to hope to win her without wooing, and such like sentimental verbiage.—And this I suppose to be the game that you and Rhoda are playing; but I tell you plainly, Mrs. Strictland, that if the whole matter is not settled in a week, I shall think you a fool, and Rhoda shall be off to her country parson's for life."

Mrs. Strictland smiled contemptuously, for no meaning, that a smile can convey, can be contrary to the laws of good breeding.

"Was not Sir James alarmed, when he heard that Rhoda was not well?" said she.

"Not in the least, that I perceived," said Mr. Strictland. "His fears of any kind did not appear to go beyond his lips; he went away smiling, and repeating again and again, that we should all meet at Lady Belmont's."

"So I hope we shall," replied Mrs. Strictland; "though I assure you that Rhoda is very seriously indisposed;

but she is so good and so reasonable, that I know she will go, if she is able to move."

"What should make her unable to move?" said Mr. Strictland. "There is something in all this that I do not understand. You can hardly think me such a novice as to believe that the offer of a title and fifteen thousand pounds a year to a girl without a sixpence, can take from her the power of her limbs!—It is more likely to make her jump with joy."

"Great events," said Mrs. Strictland, with much solemnity, "produce different effects on different temperaments."

"Mrs. Strictland," said Mr. Strictland, with the voice of authority which he never assumed but upon important occasions, "don't treat me like a fool; you will not find me one.—If I don't understand all the tricks that you and Rhoda are about, it is because there is no understanding the various forms of

female folly; but, perhaps, it may conduce to Rhoda's recovery if you tell her from me, that if she is strong enough to appear at Lady Belmont's to-night, she may draw on my banker for five hundred pounds for wedding cloaths; but if on the contrary she continues sick, she had best take a place in the mail for Byrhley, without delay."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, Sir," said Mrs. Strictland, with an air of the most provoking mock submission, "and I hope, that even a feminine intellect will be able to appreciate the two sides of your alternative."

It was, in fact, the very alternative that Mrs. Strictland herself meant to press upon Rhoda, although not quite in the terms in which it was put by Mr. Strictland; and it was the very alternative, which was at that same moment, tearing the heart and distracting the head of poor Rhoda!

CHAP. IV.

"Hast thou left him, the youth whose eye,
For ever glancing on thee, spoke so well affection's
tale!"

Southey.

Mrs. Strictland had this evening an earlier engagement, than the important one at Lady Belmont's; and she hoped, by excusing Rhoda from her attendance upon the one, that she should give her time so to recover the powers of her mind, as to secure her appearance at the other. With the intention of seeing what prospect there was of these hopes being realised, she went directly from the dining-room to Rhoda's garret; but she found her in such a state, as carried conviction even to her mind, of the impossibility that Rhoda could

that night make one in any numerous assembly.

Rhoda had found it intolerable to remain on the bed: she was up, and walking about her room with the air of a person who scarcely was conscious of what she was doing. Her cheeks glowed:—her eye was inflamed:—and while her hand communicated a burning heat to Mrs. Strictland's, she shivered with cold.

"Don't ask me to go to Lady Belmont's," said she, with almost the tone of distraction, the moment that she saw Mrs. Strictland. "I *really cannot* go: I would rather die."

Mrs. Strictland, terrified out of all her plans of management by the appearance of so much disorder, thought of nothing, but how best to calm Rhoda.

"My dearest love," said she, "I do not think of any such thing—I see that you are quite unfit—you will be better to-morrow, I have no doubt—but, my love, this is an uncomfortable place—

how unfortunate that you can have no fire—but can you creep down to my boudoir?—There you may lie upon the sopha; and I will have a bed put up in the little drawing-room, and there you may have all your comforts about you. Lean upon me, my dear, and when I have established you under my own eye, I have no doubt but that I shall make you better."

"How good you are to me!" said Rhoda; and from mere weakness of spirits, she burst into tears.

"Who would not be good to you, my Rhoda?" said Mrs. Strictland. "I understand all you feel; and I love you more than ever."

Rhoda's tears flowed faster. "Oh that I could deserve your love!" said she.

"My dear, you deserve every body's love; and you possess it. Cold as perhaps you may have thought Mr. Strictland, you will not find him so; he has just given me a proof, that he considers you as his child; but we will talk of

these things to-morrow. Now, my dear, lie down: you seem better already," added she, disposing the sopha cushions in the best manner for her accommodation. "And now keep yourself quite still: I will send for the apothecary, who will order something that will compose you: I must now dress; for at whatever sacrifice, I *must* appear at Lady Belmont's; but I will arrange every thing for your sleeping in the drawing-room, and then you will have no fresh chill; no fatigue in going up stairs: to-morrow you will be all alacrity again."

Rhoda could only kiss Mrs. Strictland's hand, and weep: but as she wept she became more calm; and her powers of reasoning seemed to return. She said to herself, "surely to-morrow, I shall be a more rational creature!"

Mrs. Strictland, by flattery and caresses, contributed all in her power to retaining Rhoda in the wrong path. She assured her that she entered into all her feelings; that they were such as did

her honour; that they would be approved by the judicious and the wise; that she was the object of universal love, and dearer to herself than ever; and, finally, that a little rest would make her quite well.

With these words she left her, and hurried to the task of the toilette, and to set agoing the arrangements for the establishment of Rhoda in the little drawing-room.

Before the business of adornment was compleated, the apothecary arrived; and Rhoda, not knowing of what to complain, sent to intreat that Mrs. Strictland would come to her assistance. This she did with a promptness that both surprised and pleased Rhoda, who had never before seen any other care supersede that of the dressing hour.

"My love, do you want me? What is it that I shall do for you?" said Mrs. Strictland, entering.

"Only tell me," said she in a low voice, "what I must say ails me."

A nod of intelligence showed Rhoda that she was understood; while Mrs. Strictland with her usual volubility, turning to the apothecary, said,

"Pray, Sir, be so kind as to feel Miss Strictland's pulse: she is fatigued, nervous, but no fever I apprehend. An anodyne draught, something that will soothe, and compose, will probably be what you will order."

"Certainly, Madam! nothing can be more proper—no real fever—a little irritation, perhaps—very soon taken off—I will send—I will order."

"Very obliging, Sir: pray do, as soon as you can! Good night, Sir! Miss Strictland, I think you say, will be well in the morning."

"No doubt, Madam; no doubt, ladies;" said the acquiescing apothecary, as he bowed out of the room.

"My dear Mrs. Strictland," said Rhoda, "what was the meaning of this visit? You prescribed for me, and not the man."

"My dear," said Mrs. Strictland; "when first I saw you, you terrified me; and in my fright, I sent in all haste for this wise person: but you are already another creature; and I was resolved, that you should not be punished with the real evil of medicine, for my folly, in giving you fifty imaginary disorders. I see that you will be quite well in the morning if you continue quiet: I will finish my dress: and pray take the gentleman's anodyne; and pleasant dreams attend you." So saying, she kissed Rhoda's cheek, and left her to her meditations. She certainly could not have left her in worse company.

Every moment, which passed without being able to decide as virtue and reason dictated, strengthened the party of all that was adverse to either. Satisfaction of heart and thought attended not the choice, on either side of the alternative. She had not strength of mind to chuse between the different degrees of the kind of good that was offered to her

acceptance; the union of *all* that was desirable—that wish of the weak and vain—could alone, at once satisfy her wishes, and silence the remonstrances of her conscience and her reason. Fortune and rank, without Mr. Ponsonby, conveyed no sense of happiness to her heart; and Mr. Ponsonby, without rank and fortune, seemed to shut her out from all that the world esteemed, or that could give her the esteem of the world.

"What shall I do?" were the words that she involuntarily repeated every moment; and as she uttered them, almost for the fiftieth time, Mrs. Wilson presented to her a little billet, for an answer to which, she said, a servant waited.

"Leave me, Wilson!" said Rhoda, for as she cast her eye on the superscription, she knew the hand-writing of Mr. Ponsonby. She tore open the paper with the impatience of distraction, and read, with a feeling, almost of horror, these words.

"I intreat you to tell me, with the strictest truth, whether you are really ill; or whether you are more to be pitied than if you were."

"It is done!" said Rhoda: "already he despises me. I can never be the wife of a man who despises me!" and snatching up a pen, she wrote,

"Think of me no more. I am unworthy of you; but, oh! do not hate me!"

Under the same delirium of feeling with which she wrote these lines, she sealed the paper, rung the bell, and delivered the letter to Wilson; then sinking back upon the sopha, she remained motionless, and stupefied; unconscious and careless of existence.

From this state of insensibility, she was roused by a sudden pang of repentance, a sensation of having undone herself for ever—a burning desire to recal what she had done—an agonizing wish to have her destiny once again in her hands.

"It is not perhaps too late!" exclaimed she, as she rang the bell violently; "I may not yet be quite undone! Bring me back that letter," cried she to Wilson; who, terrified by the hastiness of the summons, instantly appeared—"bring me back that letter—it must not go."

"It is already gone!" replied Wilson; "but here is another, which that stupid Richard ought to have delivered some hours ago."

"Oh give it me!" said Rhoda, indulging a momentary hope, that this too was from Mr. Ponsonby; but seeing it directed in the hand-writing of a tradesman, she dropt it languidly on the table, and covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

"My dear Ma'am!" said Wilson, "you will make yourself quite ill with all these flurries—indeed, indeed you must compose yourself—I am sure my lady would never forgive me if——"

"Are you quite sure that my letter is

gone—irrevocably gone?" interrupted Rhoda.

"Yes, indeed, ma'am!" but now pray ——"

"Leave me," said Rhoda—"I must, I will be alone.—Oh!" added she, as Wilson closed the door—"that I could fly from myself too!"

A moment of sad and silent meditation ensued; when the recollection of that connection which she had established in her mind, between the amount of her haberdasher's bill, and the decision which was to determine the destiny of her life, crossing her thoughts, "perhaps," said she, "I could not have done otherwise than I have done; perhaps this paper bears such marks of my folly and extravagance, as no consideration whatever would have induced me to have exposed to the eyes of Mr. Ponsonby."

The thought was the offspring of pride: Rhoda mistook it for the voice of dignity: it soothed her.

"I alone ought to suffer by my own faults—and I *shall* suffer!" added she, as she cast her eye on the sum total of the bill which she held in her hand. "How should I presume to connect with all that is upright, just, and reasonable in human nature, that frivolous creature, who has dissipated in a few months, and, in vanities, which she despises, more than half of that all, from which she could alone hope for independence through her future life! I cannot be thus unjust; and if I could, what must support me under the mortifying confession of my folly? There is but one thing that I can do: the tumult of decision is past; I resign myself to my fate!"

Nor was it extraordinary that the sadness, with which Rhoda felt this resignation to be accompanied, should deceive her into the belief that she was really about to sacrifice herself to a principle of justice, and that she was rather

the victim of circumstances, than the slave of vanity.

To forego the glitter of life she found to be impossible: yet, even in the moment when it seemed to be secured, she felt all its nothingness; and hated and despised herself for the power that it had over her. The struggle, however, seemed to be past. She remained still and dejected; and without any attention to the care of her health, or the accommodation that Mrs. Strictland had provided for her, she continued upon the sopha, in the little boudoir, without life sufficient to think or move. Tears of silent anguish, at intervals, ran down her cheek; they fell unheeded on her hands, or bosom; yet she could not have said distinctly why she wept; and still less could she think of any alternative that would have dried her tears. In vain did Wilson press her to take some refreshment, or to go to bed.

"I cannot eat—I must see Mrs. Strictland—pray leave me—I would be

alone:" was all that she returned to the waiting woman's remonstrances, and they were, indeed, all the words that she seemed to have power to utter.

It was in this state of self-abandonment that Mrs. Strictland found her at a late, or rather an early hour.

She was astonished to find her up, and dressed.

"My dearest Rhoda, what indiscretion is this?" exclaimed she: "I could not have expected this."

"Oh! pray do not scold me!" said Rhoda, "I cannot bear to be chidden just now. I am very wretched; and I thought that I should be happier if I were to see you before I went to bed."

"And you perhaps thought right, my love;" returned Mrs. Strictland: "I am sure the interest that I have heard hundreds this night express for your health, must make you better; it must be a panacea for every ill of body and mind. But poor Sir James is absolutely miserable. I could scarcely prevent him from coming, personally to inquire after you:

Nothing, indeed, I believe would have withheld him, but my promise that he should see you to-morrow."

"I cannot see Sir James to-morrow," said Rhoda. "I must have a few days, a few hours ——"

Mrs. Strictland was satisfied. She saw that the decision was made, and made as she wished it to be.

"I have told you again and again, my dear, that you shall do nothing but what you chuse to do; and I have a little plan for you, that will secure you a few days quiet, in which you may re-plume all your drooping feathers, and set your features as well as your mind in order for the change of situation which awaits you.—But we will not talk of any thing to-night:—you must go to bed:—you must take the anodyne draught; and I pledge all my skill in physics that you will arise to-morrow quite a new creature."

"Did you hear any thing of Lady Randolf to-night?" said Rhoda.

"Yes!—Something I heard—I protest I forgot what.—Oh, I believe it was that she was not coming to town immediately."

"Thank God!" said Rhoda, "now I will go to bed;" and with the alacrity consequent to the removal of a heavy burthen, Rhoda arose, and withdrew to her newly prepared apartment.

CHAP. V.

"L'art des jouer avec la morale, en mettant, autant de delicatesse par l'impression, que l'indecence dans les principes."

Staël.

THE increased consequence, which Rhoda could not but be aware that her new prospects had given her in the eyes of Mrs. Strictland, certainly did not lessen their value in her own estimation.

"If we must live in the world," thought she, "it is certainly wise to secure as many of its advantages, as innocently we can."

The word *innocently* destroyed all the healing balm, which this worldly maxim was wont to administer.

"But to be *above* these advantages,"

continued Rhoda; "to live to reason here, and to the hopes of eternal happiness hereafter!—Such, my dear Mr. Wyburg has told me, *might* be my destiny!—Have I made this option?"

The honest monitor within, replied, "*No!*" and Rhoda sought to lose the sense of self-reproach, which followed the reply, amidst a number of vague and confused intentions of "the good that she would do;"---"the happiness she would impart;" and "the example that she would exhibit."

Languid, and dissatisfied with herself, Rhoda met Mrs. Strictland in her boudoir, at a late hour the next morning. Mrs. Strictland saw that a different kind of cordial than what the apothecary's shop afforded was necessary; and with her usual skill, she lost no time in administering it.

"How few, my dear Rhoda," said she, "in this milk and water age, this age of reason and calculation, are loved with such a passion as you have in-

spired.—I really did not think that Sir James had been capable of so much ardor.—His personal servant was here by nine o'clock this morning, to inquire after your health, from Wilson. I believe he roused her from her downy couch.—Here is a note that was brought to me before I was dressed, breathing the very spirit of passionate inquiry, and I expect every moment that he will be here himself."

"You have promised me, my dear madam," said Rhoda, earnestly, "that I shall not see him."

"And I shall keep my word," replied Mrs. Strictland, "I have prepared him for the disappointment. But now, my dear, let me explain what I hinted yesterday as to Mr. Strictland's paternal care for you.—He takes so truly a fatherly part in the happy lot that you have drawn, that he sends you this draft of five hundred pounds for wedding cloaths: which may shew you, my love, what a true prophetess I am, and may

set your excellent heart at rest as to any thing that you may have considered as extravagant; nor will you have any thing to fear as to compromising your dignity, by making your husband pay for your wedding cloaths:—a hint of which, I remember, put you into a very pretty little pet with me, some few weeks ago—needlessly you now see.—I told you then, that you might do and be what you pleased, and my words are verified."

A cold chill struck to the heart of Rhoda. The preparations for her funeral would have communicated as joyful a sensation as what she now felt. "I am extremely obliged to Mr. Strictland," said she, with a deep sigh, "and his bounty will enable me to discharge the debts which I have already contracted, without obliging me to reveal,"—she checked herself;—"and I am resolved," resumed she, "that these shall be discharged before I contract more."

"I do not wish to combat your deli-

cacy on this head, my dear," replied Mrs. Strictland, "but it is really quite unnecessary.—Why should you not let all be paid at once?—Sir James, I am sure, will never think of taking a sixpence of your paltry pittance; but, perhaps, he may not think of fully supplying you with cash immediately on your marriage—It is not every man who is aware how much his wife really wants to do credit to the station in which she is placed.---If I might advise, you will keep a few hundreds untouched for contingencies, which it is impossible to foresee.—Your bills may be paid at any time.——Once the wife of Sir James Osbourne, and you cannot fear being unjust to any one; but you may wish to give a ball—or a breakfast—or to promote the pleasure of your friends in some other way, when Sir James may not exactly see the necessity of such graciousness; and what a pretty return it will be for his generosity to you, to expend the money which he has left in your

disposal, in an entertainment for his friends!—It will really be a most delightful conjugal gallantry!—But suppose there should be no occasion for you thus to come forward, a little private hoard is not amiss in any case: and let my experience suggest, that it is not wise to let go the means of having such, which are now in your power."

Mrs. Strictland's sophistry had nothing in it flattering to the vanity of Rhoda—it was rather revolting to her pride—it was lost upon her.

"Are you aware," said she, "that with the addition of my milliner's and shoemaker's bills, Hopkinson's account will do more than swallow up the half of all that I am worth in the world?"

"And, what then?" said Mrs. Strictland; "what is the use of money but to spend it?"

"But until I am one-and-twenty," said Rhoda, "I do not know that I *can* spend the principal of my fortune; and I should die with shame were I to con-

fess to Mr. Wyburg that I had contracted debts, which had made me a beggar."

"How misplaced are all these reflections," said Mrs. Strictland; "the time for them, if ever there were a time, is quite passed.—But what you say of not having a present power over your fortune, if fortune it may be called, suggests to me that it will be wise not to pay your bills now.---These five hundred pounds will furnish all the ready cash that will be necessary for the present; and by degrees you may pay the bills about which you make such a fuss, out of your pin-money, or from presents that no doubt Sir James will make you; and when you are one-and-twenty, you will have a snug little sum of your own, with which you may do a thousand pretty things, and oblige a thousand people."

"And then," replied Rhoda, "Sir James will in fact pay for my wedding cloaths!—No, no, my dear Mrs. Strictland, you must forgive me—my resolution

on this point is irrevocable.—With part of the five hundred pounds, I will immediately discharge the debts which I now have, and with the remainder I will provide all that will be necessary for my ——" marriage, she would have said, but she found it impossible to utter the word.

"Why my dear," replied Mrs. Strictland, "I am astonished to find you still so unknowing.—Has not your experience convinced you that what you propose is impossible? With the *remainder* provide all that is necessary for the bride of Sir James Osbourne!—How can you be so mistaken in your calculation? The difficulty will be to make it answer all the calls that will be upon it.—Besides," added she, in a grave tone, "I must take the liberty to tell you, that it will be an affront to Mr. Strictland, and a very ungrateful return for his kindness, if every shilling of the five hundred pounds is not expended in the manner he designed. I do assure you, that I

cannot connive at any such false appropriation of money given so generously, and for so legitimate a purpose."

"I *cannot* contract any more debts, till I have paid those which I already owe," said Rhoda; and she said the words with a tone of decision and authority which showed Mrs. Strictland that every opposition she could make to so virtuous a resolution, would be in vain. She was too adroit to push on to a certain defeat; she therefore contented herself with saying,

"Well, my dear, the matter is not worth talking about.—All will be right in the long run, either on your plan or mine.—The consideration, which presses at present, is to restore the roses to your cheeks, and gaiety to your spirits. A few days of perfect quiet will be your best physician.—Have you any objection to passing the remainder of the week with Mrs. Orme, at her beautiful villa, at Chiswick? I know that she will rejoice to see you, for the time passes heavily with her till she can afford to

come to town; and this is a season when nobody, who can help it, will go out of it."

To this proposal Rhoda most joyfully assented.

"I shall not, then, see Sir James, till my return," said she.

"Why, yes!—You must, I'm afraid," returned Mrs. Strictland. "What will he think of such a continued reluctance to see him? I have hitherto put it upon your being really ill, on your unwillingness to shew him your haggard looks; but we must remember love will make him quick-sighted; and to refuse to see a man whom you have accepted as a husband——"

"I have *not* accepted him," said Rhoda.

"My dear love," said Mrs. Strictland, "such an answer is unworthy of you. You know that you intend to marry Sir James; pray let us have no coquetry. I am sure Sir James deserves very different treatment."

"I am no coquette," said Rhoda warmly, "but if you were to know all that passes in my heart——"

"I know, my dear, what has passed in the face of the world, which is much more to the purpose. I know what has passed between Mr. Strictland and Sir James, and between Sir James and myself; and I know that if you do not intend to marry Sir James Osbourne, your conduct has been indefensible."

Rhoda sighed deeply. "Well, Madam," said she, "I put myself under your conduct. If the thing must be done, it signifies little when it is done."

"That's my good Rhoda," said Mrs. Strictland, and was proceeding in a strain of panegyric, when a knocking at the door interrupted her eloquence.

"There is Sir James, I have no doubt!" said she. "Now, my dear, if you could command yourself to see him, it would be such an act of graciousness! —He would see that your illness is perfectly genuine. He would be so

delighted with such an unexpected favor."

The footman at this moment announced Sir James Osbourne, and said, "that he had, according to Mrs. Strictland's orders, shewn him into the drawing-room."

"Now, my dear Rhoda, if you will be so obliging?"

Rhoda bowed her head. She could not speak. "Show Sir James Osbourne into this room," said the triumphant Mrs. Strictland; but turning to Rhoda, she saw her so pale, so trembling, so totally without self-command, that she half repented the order.

"Smell to this vinegar, my dear.—It is but a moment's embarrassment, and all will go on smoothly."

Sir James entered.

"Can you excuse the liberty we take with you, Sir James?" said Mrs. Strictland, "thus to receive you *en famille?* But every little movement so much indisposes Miss Strictland, and she was unwilling not to see you."

"You honour — you delight me!" said Sir James; "but, my dear Miss Strictland, I hope I see you better?—I was flattered this morning with an assurance that you were so."

"I am better, thank you," said Rhoda, in a voice scarcely audible.

"Very much so, I assure you," said Mrs. Strictland. "I would not frighten you last night by telling you how much I was terrified myself—but I really expected a fever—and when I wrote my note this morning, I thought it would have been impossible that Miss Strictland could have seen you to-day — but after all, it is only a little flutter of nerves. A few days quiet, out of town, will set every thing to rights."

"You are not going to leave town?" said Sir James Osbourne, in a voice of alarm.

"*I* am not," replied Mrs. Strictland; "and Rhoda will be absent only a very few days. She is going to my friend Mrs. Ormie, merely to be out of the sound of

London. I shall visit her every day; and if you are not *better engaged*, I shall be always glad of your company. I have no doubt but that we shall bring her back in health and bloom within the week."

"Will my dear Miss Strictland tell me that I shall be a welcome visitor?" said Sir James, looking earnestly and anxiously on the pale and motionless statue that sat opposite to him.

"If I am able to see any body, I shall be glad to see you," said Rhoda, faintly.

"And you will be very able to see us, or any body," said Mrs. Strictland, "and Sir James need not look so terrified.—My dear friend, did you never see the effects of fatigue before?—All this mischief is imputable to my abominable ball: and Rhoda was so determined to make it delightful to every body; that she did not spare herself a single moment—but the evil is transitory—the *pleasures* of that evening will be an epoch in all our lives."

" Of the happiest kind!" cried Sir James fervently. " My dear Miss Strictland will, I hope, permit me to say that?"

Rhoda gracefully bowed—" I am really ashamed to be so stupid," said she, " but to-morrow——"

" Yes, to-morrow you will be quite another creature, and now let us turn Sir James out—he sees that you are alive, which is bliss enough for to-day, and the sooner you are in the repose of the country the better.

Sir James arose—" I would not interfere with your arrangements for the world," said he. " I cannot be sufficiently grateful for the favour I have received. To-morrow perhaps, I may be permitted to tell you how highly I appreciate it."

Rhoda again bowed.

" Good morning, my dear Sir James," said Mrs. Strictland, shaking hands with him.

"And will not you do me the same favour?" said Sir James to Rhoda.

Rhoda put forth her hand, which the happy lover pressed to his heart and to his lips, and then departed, more in love and more self-satisfied than he had ever been in his life before.

The last half hour had indeed removed from his mind a load of most unpleasant apprehensions. — He had entered Mr. Strictland's house a prey to very uneasy suspicions —He had began to believe that the sudden and violent illness, with which Rhoda was said to have been attacked, was merely a pretence to veil from him her reluctance to accept his proposals, and that he was not to be admitted to her sight until the remonstrances of her friends had induced her so far to conquer this reluctance, as to be able to conceal it from him.— These suspicions had already made him repent of the frankness, with which he had explained himself; and had filled his mind with indistinct projects, how

he might best withdraw himself from the snare into which he had run. But to have been so promptly admitted into the presence of Rhoda, to be told, notwithstanding an indisposition which he could not but see was unfeigned, that she was unwilling not to see him:—to behold a confusion and agitation which bore more the marks of delicate consciousness, than of dislike or repugnance:—to hear the only words that she seemed to be able to utter, words of kindness and conciliation, had dissipated at once all his fears and suspicions; and had replaced them with impressions the most flattering to his self-love, and hopes the most favourable to his future happiness.

Rhoda herself felt relieved by what had passed.—Her imagination had represented the interview more formidable than she had found it.—The first step was made—all the rest she hoped would be easy in comparison.

"You are right, my dear Mrs. Strictland," said she; "it was much better

to see Sir James this morning, than to delay it even till to-morrow."

"I know this to be the case, my dear," said Mrs. Strictland, "and for your sake I should from the beginning have insisted that it should be so, but I could not bear to impose upon your good nature; and indeed I always find, that give you a moment for consideration, and I may safely trust to your good sense and excellent taste."

These praises were grateful to Rhoda, sunk as she was at this moment in her own estimation, and dreading as she did, the representations and remonstrances of those, of whose principles and judgment she had a better opinion than her own. From this feeling, Rhoda started with dismay on seeing a letter from Lady Randolf, amongst those which the servant now brought into the room.

"Lady Randolf is coming to town, I am sure!" exclaimed she, before she broke the seal. "What, what shall I do now?"

"What can make you so much afraid of Lady Randolf?" said Mrs. Strictland, "I am sure, if she is as much your friend as she pretends to be, she will be delighted with your prospects."

"What a relief!" cried Rhoda, inattentive to Mrs. Strictland's remark. "She is *not* coming to town!—She does not know when she shall come to town!—Oh, how glad, how thankful I am!"

"What strange moralizing fancy keeps her in the country?" asked Mrs. Strictland.

"I don't know.—I have only read the first lines.—Oh, how I am grieved!—What a selfish heart I have!---It is misfortune, it is sorrow that prevents her from coming!—She who, of all people in the world, ought most to be exempted from misfortune and sorrow! A friend—a very dear friend—to whom she says that she owes all her means of happiness in this world, and all her hopes of bliss in the next, a something, even dearer

than a mother—this dear, this excellent person is ill—is stretched on the bed of pain and death, and Lady Randolf is gone to her:—and I could rejoice that by such means I am spared—what?—The knowledge of myself!—Ah, there needs nobody to tell me what a foolish, vain, and selfish creature I am!"

Mrs. Strictland suffered the furor of self-reproach to spend itself, without any contradiction on her part, and then said, very quietly,

"My dear Rhoda, you quite forget that the carriage is coming to the door to carry us to Chiswick, and you have given no orders to Wilson, as to what you will take with you."

"Indeed I have never thought about the matter," said Rhoda.

"No, my love—but I have thought for you. I have ordered Wilson to send for her niece. You cannot go without an attendant, and I told Wilson to put up what I thought you would want—but

if I have omitted any thing, you may have it to-morrow."

"Thank you, madam," said Rhoda.

"By the bye, my dear, if you should like this young woman's attendance, you may as well engage her—it is comfortable to have somebody about one, who is not quite a stranger."

Rhoda's heart sunk at the thoughts of such preparation.

"Dear madam, it is time enough to think of such things!—Who knows what may happen?"

Mrs. Strictland secretly gave an ejaculation of thanksgiving, that Lady Randolf was in misfortune, and in sorrow, by the side of the death-bed of her dearest friend;—but she only said,

"Oh, my dear, I don't pretend to any very extended prescience, but here comes the carriage, and as far as I can judge of a *limited future*, if we do not make haste, we shall be out of all time for Mrs. Orme, and perhaps not be able to negociate your visit to her."

These fears were, however, vain:—the drive to Chiswick was happily accomplished. Mrs. Orme was found at home and ready, and well pleased to receive Rhoda, whose approaching exaltation Mrs. Strictland found an opportunity of whispering to her friend, with a hint how admirable a *chaperon* Lady Osbourne would prove to the Misses Orme, during the ensuing London season.

CHAP. VI.

" The heart demands a heart, nor will be paid
With less than what it gives."

More.

Rhoda soon felt the advantage of being obliged to conceal her feelings—and it was this very advantage, rather than any that Mrs. Strictland hoped from the quiet of the situation, which had induced her to remove Rhoda from her own immediate observation. From being compelled by good-breeding to appear cheerful and at ease, she doubted not but that Rhoda would attain the habit of appearing so, even when under no such restraint.—Appearance was all that Mrs. Strictland looked to. — She well knew that Rhoda did not love Sir James Osbourne, and that she did love

Mr. Ponsonby; but while she durst trust to her vanity for her marriage with the one, and for her rejection of the other, she had no farther concern, than that this should be done with such apparent satisfaction on the part of Rhoda, as would deceive Sir James, and make the world believe her to be as happy as titles, jewels, and fortune can make any one. Mrs. Strictland also knew that every new person, to whom Rhoda's intended marriage was intimated, and every hour in which she suffered unchecked this intimation to remain in force, was strengthening the chain, which she was now resolved, should never be broken, and which, by such means, she had no doubt, would become sufficiently strong to resist all the opposition which she could not but expect to arise from Rhoda's friends at Byrhley, and the pleadings of Mr. Ponsonby.

Thus, without appearing to controul the will of Rhoda, or to throw any obstacles in the way of a fair discussion of

that question which involved the happiness, or misery of her future life, Mrs. Strictland stifled, at its birth, every virtuous tendency which arose in the heart of the young and inexperienced creature whom she professed so ardently to love; and wove around the poor victim of vanity and miscalculation, so artful a web of consequences, that it seemed impossible for Rhoda to take any part but one.—Let mothers, who act the same part, pause for a moment before the unholy sacrifice is completed, and reflect on the awful responsibility which they incur!

Rhoda looked with much more apprehension to what would arise from Byrhley, than Mrs. Strictland did. Not that she, any more than Mrs. Strictland, conceived it would have any effect on the great event then depending: this she considered as being irrevocably fixed; but she dreaded the voice of her own conscience, re-echoed in the tremendous sounds of Mr. Wyburg's rectitude—or

the melting strains of the tenderness of her Frances. Of Mr. Ponsonby she dared not to think. The injustice, which she did him, was so monstrous, that if she had viewed it in its true form, she must have fled from it, as she would have fled from the most deadly destroyer; but she spread a false medium before her eyes, and by its distorting form, enabled herself to see things rather as she wished them to be, than as they were. She persuaded herself, from the tenor of Mr. Ponsonby's last application to her, that the lover, who was so ready to suppose the possibility of her unworthiness, would not be much hurt by the confirmation of it. "Had he pleaded his rights," said she to herself, "I should not have dared to deny him—but that which he was so willing to resign, it did not behove me sedulously to regard!"—So she said; but she felt the argument false, and the conclusion sorrowful!

But all these uneasy thoughts, as well as those which arose from the fluctuation of her own wishes, she was now obliged to varnish over by the smoothness of her countenance; and this enforced command over herself, with the relief which she felt on being secure from the scrutinizing, and as she expected, the reproving eye of Lady Randolf, with the feeling safe, at least, for a few hours, at once from the dreaded letter from Byrhley, and the presence of Sir James, communicated more quiet to the mind, and restored more power to the reasoning faculties of Rhoda, than she had possessed since the eventful evening of Tuesday.

The next morning, and the next three succeeding days, brought her regularly a visit from Mrs. Strictland, and Sir James. Mrs. Strictland saw with much satisfaction, the recovered composure, and returning bloom of Rhoda; and the more was she satisfied, as she was aware

that the complacency and graciousness, with which she received Sir James, and the freedom with which she conversed with him, could leave him nothing farther to wish.

But the heart of a lover, and of a lover that numbers more than double the years of his mistress, is not so easily satisfied. Sir James felt that there was nothing of which he could complain; but he equally felt that there was nothing in Rhoda's manners towards him which could possibly gratify his self-love, or lead him to hope that she returned the passion which he felt for her. Her natural gaiety seemed to be extinct: and while she was too calm and indifferent to suffer him to flatter himself that her gravity arose from the absorbing nature of real love, he looked in vain for any symptoms of pleasure, even in those external advantages, which an union with him would secure to her. If, therefore, he acquitted her of having been determined, in her acceptance of him, by vain or mercenary

motives, it was equally out of his power to flatter himself that her choice had been determined by a personal preference in his favour.

These observations occasioned Sir James to make many reflections; and to ground upon these reflections certain resolutions, that belonged rather to the prudent and wary character which he had hitherto maintained in his intercourse with the female sex, than such as might have been expected from a man as sincerely and ardently in love as he really was.

Rhoda was too much occupied with her own thoughts, to penetrate those of Sir James, and too incapable of design, to have attempted to have obviated the consequences, had they been foreseen. She was scarcely conscious that she was less gay than usual; and as it was more that she could not forego the splendours of life, than any very distinct notion of the happiness which they could convey, that had decided her mode of action, she

at this time felt neither actual nor anticipated joy, in the expected possession of those toys, for which she had sacrificed the real inclinations of her heart, and the delicacy and integrity of her mind.

Seeing Sir James every day, and treating him with obligingness and freedom, seemed to her, now to be as matters of course, because she accustomed herself to the thought—"I am going to be married to him;" but she would have been content to have remained at Chiswick, for any time, however indefinite; and she felt even something like a fear of returning to town, where she was conscious that the present calm of her mind would be broken in upon from many quarters. Sir James, from different motives, was as little inclined as herself to precipitate matters; and it required the exertions of a third person, who was, in fact, no ways interested in the event, to bring together two people—one of whom had sacrificed his prudence, and the

other her principles, that they might become man and wife.

Mrs. Strictland, however, was not of a disposition to fall asleep over her work. Every hour spent at Chiswick, beyond that which had restored to Rhoda her self-command, she considered as lost time; and she found means delicately to insinuate to Sir James, on his return from his third visit thither, that Rhoda now considered herself as quite well, and that she wished to return to town.

"I will therefore go myself to fetch her to-morrow morning, my dear Sir James. You must dine with us. We shall only be ourselves; for really I think it has already been sufficiently hard upon Rhoda and you, thus always to meet in company."

"Perhaps," thought Sir James, and his happiest hopes revived as the thought occurred—"perhaps the restraint, which that circumstance threw over her, has

occasioned the gravity, that I have found so painful."

"If I could hope," replied Sir James, "that Miss Strictland would see me with pleasure *any where*, I should be too happy."

These words betrayed to Mrs. Strictland more than Sir James meant to have discovered. They shocked and alarmed her; but they did not throw her off her guard. She counterfeited, with admirable adroitness, the laugh of conscious superiority.

"Oh man! man!" said she, "with all thy boasted wisdom, how little dost thou know of the female heart! And pray, do not expect any sacrifice to your vanity from me. I am bound to keep Rhoda's secrets; and he, who cannot discover her sentiments, is not worthy of them."

"Ah, my dear madam," cried Sir James, "if you have one word of comfort to give, for mercy's sake, let me

have it. Is it unpardonable to fear that Miss Strictland is too grave to be happy in her prospects?"

"You made me laugh a moment ago," returned Mrs. Strictland; "and now you will really make me angry. Can it be any thing but the most puerile vanity that makes you press me upon a subject on which I ought to be silent, and what you cannot doubt?"

"Pray pardon me," said Sir James. "Diffidence, grounded upon a consciousness of demerit, ought not to be stigmatized as vanity."

"Well, then, my dear, good, humble creature, it shall not be vanity: it shall be diffidence—it shall be modesty, or any of the out-of-date virtues that you please;—but pray, don't suffer a doubt of your own merit to lead you to suspect that of others. Let Rhoda be allowed integrity enough not to be suspected of giving her hand without her heart; and discernment sufficient to ap-

preciate talents and accomplishments, for which so many have, I suspect, sighed in vain."

Sir James, although not much in the habit of giving implicit credit to Mrs. Strictland, was extremely inclined to believe her at this moment.

"You are too flattering, my dear Mrs. Strictland. You will, indeed, make me vain."

"Your unreasonable doubtings really force such strange things from one!" replied Mrs. Strictland; "but I cannot do much mischief, when I only anticipate what you must soon so fully know. Only of this be assured, that you would have found it impossible to have drawn such an insinuation from me a week ago, notwithstanding the frights and flutters that some of us were in."

Sir James, although he longed to pursue the subject, felt it to be unhandsome, and indelicate to Rhoda, so to do; and he therefore contented himself with replying,

" My dear Mrs. Strictland, what delightful glimpses do you give me into the only female heart that I can now ever wish to know!—But sacred be the confidence reposed in you: the rest of my discoveries I will owe to myself."

Sir James, thus re-assured, parted gaily with Mrs. Strictland, expecting that the dinner of the next day would confirm all that she had intimated; while Mrs. Strictland returned to her house, with her thoughts wholly occupied how she should best lead Rhoda to obviate the suspicions which she now saw that Sir James entertained, without betraying to Rhoda that any such existed.

This was the purpose of the artful conversation which she held with her, as they returned together the next morning from Chiswick; but she found the point difficult to manage. It had been her business hitherto to persuade Rhoda that she was happy, and to be herself blind to every possibility that she could be otherwise; and how could she re-

prove her gravity, without betraying that she suspected a cause for it? Neither durst she attempt to alarm her by the fear that she might blast her prospects, by the little pleasure which she appeared to take in them. She knew that Rhoda disdained all disguise; and that if she smiled, she must smile from gaiety, and not from design. She had recourse to the old expedient of assuming indisposition.

"My dear," said she, "notwithstanding all your kind attempts to conceal it, I see that you are still extremely unwell. I shall send to Doctor C—— the moment we get to town, for really we must not go on in the dark any longer."

"Indeed," replied Rhoda, "I am quite well; and if you send for Doctor C——, I shall be at as great a loss what to say to him, as I was to say to the apothecary."

"Oh, but Doctor C—— will find out what is the matter, without being

told; and I can no longer be easy without some good advice."

"What can make you think that I am ill?" said Rhoda.

"Because, my dear, you who are naturally gaiety itself, merely from a happy flow of animal spirits, are less gay than usual, when you have so many substantial reasons for gladness and *gaieté de cœur*."

Rhoda breathed a deep sigh. "Yet I am not ill!" replied she.

"I should be sorry to urge the alternative," said Mrs. Strictland; "but really, my dear, if you are not ill, you are ungrateful."

"To whom, my dear madam?" said Rhoda, with quickness.

"To Providence, in the first place, my love, which offers to your acceptance all that can give happiness to yourself, or enable you to communicate it to others. To Sir James, in the next place, whose ardent and delicate affection is tremblingly alive to every shade that

passes over your beautiful countenance, and whom you sent home yesterday, perfectly wretched, from the persuasion that you were ill. Indeed his fears awakened mine; for, until he made the observation, I had seen nothing to be remarked beyond a thoughtfulness easy to be understood in circumstances so new, and which certainly involve very serious considerations."

"There is nothing beyond this," replied Rhoda.

"So I told Sir James; but there was no laying his tender fears to sleep: so that if you have a generous care for his ease of mind, you must really rouse yourself, and shake off this "sickly cast of thought," which is so liable to be mistaken;—and indeed I may add, that you owe this exertion—not to me, my dear; I will not say *that*, for I am most gratified, when you are most at your ease;—but to Mr. Strictland. You have not seen him since the very fatherly present that he made you. If he sees you with

this grave face, he will think his money has been thrown away; and you know he is not one who loves a bad bargain."

Rhoda smiled.

"Now that's my dear Rhoda!" said Mrs. Strictland. "I am sure, if Mr. Strictland thought as I do, that one smile was worth the whole five hundred pounds."

"I cannot tell," said Rhoda, "why, when I am doing that which I have *chosen* to do, my heart should feel so heavy."

"Merely the newness of the circumstance, take my word for it; but really, you must get the better of this trick of looking all you feel. If we were all to do as you do, we should be a mournful party. You cannot look grave without making us all sad; and if we look so, those that see us will think that we are preparing for a funeral, rather than a wedding."

"Why should any body think about us?" said Rhoda.

" Because people will think about what does not concern them ;—and one hint I must give you : If you carry that countenance into public, you will give malicious persons reason to say, that you dispose of your hand from other motives than such as ought to determine a woman of delicacy and honour."

Rhoda coloured " celestial rosy red." " Oh, madam !" said she.

" I know how unfounded such an insinuation would be, my dear love ; but that is not the question. If you would not be mistaken for what you are not, you must a little veil what you at *this moment* are. The time is at hand, when the appearance and the feeling iwll agree."

" In the mean time," said Rhoda, pensively, " I must, I see, for my credit's sake, a little ' beguile the thing I am, by seeming what I am not.' "

" You are quite right, my dear," returned Mrs. Strictland ; " and now let me see you at dinner, with all the loves

and graces in your train,—but let them be loves and graces of your own! Borrow none from Melpomene, I beg."

"The letters were not delivered when you left town?" said Rhoda, as they stopped at Mr. Strictland's door.

"I believe not."

"Are there any letters?" said Rhoda to the footman, as they passed into the house.

"No, madam," replied the man.

And Rhoda, relieved from an almost insupportable apprehension, ran up stairs with a lightness and gaiety, which convinced Mrs. Strictland that her lecture had not been wholly thrown away.

CHAP. VII.

> "Oh that I had more sense of virtue left;
> Or were of that which yet remains bereft!
> I've just enough to know how I offend,
> And to my shame, have not enough to mend."
>
> *Dryden.*

"I AM safe for twenty-four hours more!" said Rhoda to herself. "Let me lose the future in the present. It will be time enough to-morrow to grieve that I and my dearest friends *cannot think alike!*"

Rhoda, having thus softened the tone of self-reproach, sought Mr. Strictland, and made him her acknowledgments with equal grace and cheerfulness; nor was the latter diminished by observing a marked change which had taken place in his manners towards her. She read

in it the increase of her own relative importance; and she was not unapt to adopt his opinion most graciously expressed, "that she would now be a real honour to the family."

"I shall write this evening to Sir William," said he. "I long to give him and Lady Elizabeth their share in the pleasure which we all feel in your good luck."

The last words grated disagreeably on Rhoda's feelings; and her heart died within her, when she thought of the vicinity of Strictland Hall to Byrhley Parsonage. But this day she had resolved not to think; and therefore willingly followed Mrs. Strictland's lead in all the flow of eloquence with which she discoursed for a full hour, on that mass of nothings which made up with her the sum of life. The cares of the toilette succeeded; and Rhoda might be supposed, by the happy effect which they had produced, not to be indifferent to the impression which she should make

upon Sir James on her first emerging from the eclipse, which had lately obscured her brightness.

He was, indeed, at once dazzled and enraptured; and could scarcely believe that the animated and glowing creature which stood before him, could be the same cold, sad, and pensive nun from whom he had parted the day before.

"I see you perfectly well, I hope, my dear Miss Strictland," said he. "But why do I ask?—Can my heart doubt of what is so evident to my eye?"

"Oh! my dear Sir James," said Mrs. Strictland, "you and I are wretched physicians. With our fears and alarms, Rhoda is wiser than us both. We had actually over-dosed our poor patient with quiet and stillness, and such soporifics.—She "would have forgotten herself to stone," if she had stayed at Chiswick longer. The very trampling of the horses' feet upon the pavement of London wrought the cure, and now you see how perfect it is."

Rhoda blushed: and Sir James believed all that Mrs. Strictland had endeavoured to insinuate the day before.

Rhoda, delighted with the pleasure which she communicated, resumed something of her happiest self; and as through the whole course of the evening engagements she found herself courted by the voice of congratulation, or heard the tone of ill-concealed envy, she began to persuade herself that she was really as happy as the felicitations, or the malice of her acquaintance proclaimed her to be. Willing to deceive herself, she checked each thought that might have dissolved the charm—she listened to Sir James, and smiled:—she heard the laugh of her companions, and laughed too.—She mistook contagion for gaiety, and gaiety for happiness; and returned to Grosvenor-square, convinced that she had chosen the means of securing her happiness for life.

Mrs. Strictland closely watched the movements of Rhoda's mind, and saw

that if she could keep her always in that succession of frivolous engagements which precludes the possibility of thought, she might alike set at defiance the regret of predilection, and the remonstrance of principle.

In the furtherance of this design, she was resolved to leave her scarcely a moment alone. — Her inexhaustible volubility furnished her with never-ending means of retaining the attention of Rhoda on the scenes in which she had been engaged, even when those scenes were passed.—She would repeat or invent so many flatteries, that Rhoda had received—so many strokes of satire that her good fortune had excited, that she kept her vanity or her pride always awake.—She knew how to make the haughty indignation of Lady Belmont, or the mean envy of Lady Renkin so ridiculous, and at the same time so galling, that while Rhoda believed she was only amused by what she so heartily despised, she was stimulated more than

ever to retain an elevation, from which she could look down with so much dignity on her detractors and enviers.

It seemed impossible that Mrs. Strictland could separate herself from Rhoda for a moment. "Now, my dear, that we are so soon to part," would she say, "you must forgive me if I am a little importuning.—The moments are so precious, and they fly so fast!" And then there was still an unfinished narrative to conclude, or an untold *bon mot* to repeat,—or there was some arrangement to be made,—or some article of dress to be chosen, which so fully and variedly filled the moments of the evening retirement, or the morning seclusion, that without any appearance of design on the part of Mrs. Strictland, Rhoda was never left a moment to herself.

Thus passed the two days and nights immediately succeeding Rhoda's return from Chiswick; and she had begun almost to hope that nothing from Byrhley would arise, which would oblige her to

turn her eyes once more within. The hope, however, was not unmixed with pain.

"Am I so soon forgotten?—Am I not worth the trial of one effort to retain me?" were the thoughts that would at times glance through her mind; but she drove them from her. "Be it so!" would she say. "All but the more convinces me that I have chosen wisely."

But did she so think, did she so feel, when on the third day, she received the following letter from Miss Wyburg?—

"Awake! my dearest Rhoda, awake! Rouse yourself from the dream of imagination!—Shake off the torpor of luxury!—Listen to the voice of friendship, and of reason. The interests of your mortal existence, perhaps of *more* than your mortal existence, hang upon the decision of the moment! Your happiness and your integrity are in the balance: what shall outweigh them?—Dearest creature, ask yourself what it

is that you reject, and what it is that you pursue. Do you seek for talents to guide—virtue to stimulate—affection to engage you?—Where shall you find the object of your search more powerful, more pure, more ardent, than in the form which was once so pleasant to your eyes?—Have those talents, this virtue, this affection, suffered any deterioration? Have they lost any part of their value in your eyes?—And will rank, will fortune, will distinction indemnify you for the loss of them?—Pause—reflect. Your heart will not adopt such a choice: it will rebel against your will, and the consequence will be wretchedness!—Is it for myself that I thus plead? Is it for him whose happiness ought to be *your* care, that I supplicate?—No, my dearest friend, it is for an interest dearer than either: it is for yourself, it is for your honour, your integrity, your happiness, that I thus wrestle with you—that I would, if possible, subdue you, though at the

price of my life! The sacrifice would be less than that which your degradation must extort from me. Forgive me, my dearest friend; I do not believe that this sacrifice will ever be exacted. I know your difficulties. I know that you think them greater than they are; but the irrevocable word cannot have been spoken. The chains that bind you may yet be broken. One vigorous struggle, and they fall, like the adamantine walls of an enchanted castle, when touched with the spear of true knighthood. Your heart and your principles are untainted. Those fatal lines, which have made us all so miserable, assure me that they are. Your imagination only is led astray;—your point of view is false: your safety lies in change of position. The marriage which leads you to destruction, will appear in all its barrenness, when viewed through the medium of truth. Return to Byrhley, my dearest friend: there will every illusion vanish;—there will you see all things as they are;—there

your judgment will be unshackled,—your fancy unseduced;—there you may really determine as reason and inclination dictate: and be that decision what it will, there you will find no selfish feelings—no false views of the duties or the blessings of life, opposed to your decision:—it will be submitted to even by him whom it *may* destroy. We ask but that you should see your way clearly—that you should not, blindfold, sign your destruction. If, *indeed*, 'your heart *has* followed your eyes,'—if purple and fine linen *are* necessary to your happiness, we have no more to say. You must act accordingly. The tremendous consequences must be incurred! But, be assured, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that this is really the case; and decide not, in the delirium of a fever, that act, on which your felicity, temporal and eternal, may depend. Return, my beloved, return, and all will be well!"

What a tumult did the perusal of this paper occasion in the mind of Rhoda! It seemed for a moment to annihilate all her resolutions, to overturn all her plans, to recal her, with an authority which she could not resist, to the paths of rectitude—truth and honour!

"But, where, miserable as I am," cried she, "can I now find them? Evil I *must* do—false and injurious I must be, whether I break my first or second engagement. It cannot be circumstances alone, that have placed me in this most unfortunate of all situations. The cause has been in myself—in my own misguided imagination—my own ill-regulated heart.—And can such an imagination, can such a heart, be a present worthy of him, who never acts, who never thinks, but as the organ of truth and virtue? Were I to yield at this moment to their voice, what would secure me from a second dereliction? My justice, my self-love, forbid me to

form an union so unequal. I should be too much humbled in such a connection.—Already he feels his superiority; even Frances does not disguise it.—No!—I must abide by the resolution that I have taken; and must leave *him* to better hopes and better prospects, than any which I could ever have realised.—The sooner I tell him so the better, the more honourable."

Rhoda took up her pen, and wrote as follows:

"The irrevocable word *is* spoken:—but, oh, my Frances, do not therefore shrink from your friend. Say not that she is degraded; say not that she is unjust—to none but herself is she unjust;—she is not even changed. The fault has been the not knowing sooner what I was—I have attained this knowledge too late perhaps for my honour, but not for my integrity. I have at length examined—I was going to say, my heart—

but I know not that the scrutiny has been carried so far.—My fancy, however, my taste, my habits I have examined, and I find there is so much to *them* indispensable, which it will not be in the power of Mr. Ponsonby to give, that I should wrong him cruelly, were I to prefer my engagements to my sincerity. Of the truth of this he must be as fully persuaded as I am myself; and however he may lament that the virtues and the qualities, which I owed wholly to his imagination, had no solid foundation, he cannot regret the loss of a creature, despoiled of all that gave her value in his eyes. Would he recognise *his* Rhoda in the vain, the world-loving, the extravagant being, who estimates herself by the opinion of those whom she despises—who cannot forego what yet does not make her happy—and who, in compliances, which her heart condemns, has dissipated in a few months what might have made her in-

dependent and respectable for life?—This last truth, I thought that nothing could have induced me to have disclosed—I meant not to have disclosed it—but I can do all, except conceal myself from you!—I cannot deceive you, my Frances, even to retain your love---and if the *truth* can lessen the regrets of him, whom I once —— whom I shall always wish happy, why should I grudge it him?--But yet---you must not---you must not either of you hate me---yet I hate, I despise myself. But do not you hate, do not you despise me. Without your love, my Frances, without something of your good opinion, I shall be reckless what I do, or what I am. Oh, that I were more, or less what I ought to be---that I less saw the nothingness of what I love, or loved it less!---But I have lost the right to complain to you---forgive me the anguish I occasion you. Forget me---think of me no more!---Oh, no!—you must not forget me, you must

think of me—pray for me!—But you will believe that I rave—I will have done—my destiny is fixed—it is irrevocable as that love with which, in spite of my worthlessness, I shall ever be your

"RHODA."

The agitation, which the writing of this letter produced, made Rhoda unfit to see Mrs. Strictland for some hours. She closed the door against all intruders, and firmly refused to open it to any one. Mrs. Strictland was in agonies.—She waited the issue of so extraordinary a seclusion in a state of misery, that would have been indeed pitiable, had it arisen from a more worthy cause,—but her fears were unfounded.—Rhoda meditated not a return to the path of rectitude; she sought only to conceal the effects of her dereliction, and she was no sooner able to still the beatings of her heart, and the trembling of her limbs, and to efface from

her countenance the traces of her late emotion, than she was ready once more to enter into the world, and there to lose all sense of the truth of things, in the flattering falsehoods with which she was surrounded.—One thing, however, in the torrent of passion which hurried her pen along, she had left undone; and when in a calmer moment she adverted to the omission, she felt as if she would rather die than supply it.—Yet it must be done—the still unfolded paper was as a basilisk to her sight—she dreaded to turn her eye upon it—she shrunk from the touch. How then could she add the few lines which must sometime be written, and which if not now written, she felt that she should never have courage to write! She averted her head, and almost without looking at the paper, wrote these words:

" I know nothing of my rights: I think nothing of them; but if the goodness of Mr. Wyburg could, without

any hazard to himself, put me into possession of the whole of what I inherit from my uncle, I should be enabled the sooner to limit to myself the effects of my folly."

CHAP. VIII.

"This is my lady's wedding day;
And therefore we keep holiday,
And come for to be merry."

Old Ballad.

RHODA having thus made her decision, was at least wise enough not to indulge in regret for the blessings that she had rejected. Of the past she was resolved not to think: she looked straight onward, and was able, by a great deal of imagination, and some false reasoning, to persuade herself that no thorn of self-reproach lurked beneath the flowers, with which her future path appeared to be strewn. If something of doubt as to the accuracy of her conclusions obtruded itself, when she received, under

a blank cover from Mr. Wyburg, the whole of the property left her by her uncle, she re-established herself in all the comforts of a self-acquitting faith, by the haste with which she appropriated the largest part of the money to the discharging the debts already contracted; and by the resolution that henceforward she would incur none beyond what her regular income would enable her to pay. Having found that to be true, which Mrs. Strictland had asserted, that "Sir James would not touch a farthing of her paltry hundreds," she willingly, and cheerfully committed the whole of the five hundred pounds, given by Mr. Strictland, to be laid out according to the unerring taste of Mrs. Strictland, in bridal finery; reserving the small remnant of her own property, for a purpose more grateful to the heart than any personal ornament could be, even in this hour of vanity and ostentation.

This early specimen of Sir James's generosity gave her a foretaste of the

pleasures arising from affluence, and made her afresh congratulate herself, on the wisdom of her choice: nor were any doubts of his future controul in such particulars awakened, by being informed, that in consequence of being taken, thus wholly portionless, Sir James had declined making any settlement on herself, although he had secured to every individual of possible progeny, all and more than all that Mrs. Strictland could ask or wish. Rhoda was now in the habit of taxing the future for the expenses of the present; and she consoled herself for any unwilling consciousness of what might be wrong in the setting out, by the resolution that all should be right in the progress: she therefore attended but little to all the explanations and discussions with which Mrs. Strictland endeavoured to make her understand "the rights of her thirds" — "the opportunities that she might have of attending to her own interests;" "the influence, that any

woman of common sense, must have over a husband;".— with many other divisions and subdivisions of that code of domestic wisdom, which is so kindly dealt by Nature to the weaker sex, as a counterbalance to the power of the stronger.

Rhoda, incapable of any mercenary calculation, even at the very moment when the destiny of her life was decided by a love of the indulgencies that money can procure, was indifferent to all such suggestions.

She could trust *all* to the love of Sir James, and to the effect of her own good behaviour! She would be the best of wives—She knew that Sir James would always provide for her happiness!

Alas! She had forgotten, in her choice of securities for this happiness, the only one, on which she might have relied with safety—her own love for Sir James!—She took it for granted that this was proved by her consent to become

his wife; and having once got over the agitation that the settling this point had occasioned her, she avoided all retrospect as to the motives that had determined her choice.

If the vanity of Sir James asked something more appropriate, and exclusive in the affection which Rhoda professed, his reason could not but be satisfied by her manners towards him. Gay and affectionate, easy and equable, if his absence had not been regretted, his company appeared always to be acceptable. The little importance, which she seemed to attach to all the circumstances of her marriage, and which kept Mrs. Strictland in the fever of occupation from morning until night, flattered Sir James into the belief, that if he had not been able to kindle in the breast of Rhoda a passion equal to his own, he yet did not owe her preference to any thing that was apart from himself. Thus equally hoodwinked, they mutually walked blindly on towards that matrimonial

gulph, which was to swallow up the happiness of each.

At length the settlements, the dress, the jewels, the equipage, were complete! The day, the hour was arrived, when Sir James was to be the happiest of his sex, and Miss Strictland the most enviable of her's!

At the morning hour of five, *post meridiem*, in the presence of a few select friends, consisting of above fifty persons, who scarcely knew each others' names, but from their visiting tickets: —in the most private manner—surrounded by every ostent of vanity and show, Rhoda gave her hand, and vowed love, honour, and obedience to Sir James Osbourne, and received his indemnifying vow of undeviating constancy, love, honour, and support!—Congratulations from every mouth succeeded the irrevocable ceremony. The whispers of applause and envy went round; and Sir James led his bride from

her crowd of admiring friends, to his elegant travelling equipage, which stood ready to convey *the happy pair* to the enchanting solitudes of his villa at Twickenham!

CHAP. IX.

> "Many a withering thought lies hid
> In smiles that least befit who wear them most."
>
> *Byron.*

HERE, if no motive occurred to call forth regret, there was leisure sufficient to awaken reflection.

Amongst the essential ceremonies that attend the matrimonial engagements of the great, and the distinguished, there is none more indispensable than that of letter writing, and receiving letters. Sir James complained, in the most animated terms, of the precious moments that were ravished from him by so imperious a duty; and which was the more provoking, as his beloved Rhoda did not appear to have any similar demands upon

her time, which might have rendered his leisure, could he have had it, fruitless.

Rhoda also felt that she had indeed no such occupation: but she lamented rather than enjoyed her freedom. She felt alone in the world! Her marriage had cut her off from the only human beings, who had ever truly loved her; who had been disinterestedly concerned for her welfare!—Now, indeed, it was that she felt all the depressing chill of Mr. Wyburg's blank cover!—What would she not have given for one word of kindness—of remonstrance—of admonition—even of reproach!—But no such word came: and the silence was as the silence of death. Had she then ceased to live in the hearts and the memory of those whom she best loved, and most highly valued; and had they, in ceasing to esteem her, lost all care for her happiness, all solicitude for her conduct! She did not dare to put the doubt to an issue; she did not dare to

announce that the irrevocable word had been followed by the irrevocable deed. She could add nothing exculpatory, beyond what she had already urged; she could make no stronger appeal to the affections than her last letter contained. Was a difference of opinion, a difference of feeling, to be followed by a total dereliction?—She thought it hard:—yet she knew not how to call it unjust. The silence which pained her, she felt, could not be the silence of indifference: she was aware that it was impossible, that the pleasures of acquaintance could succeed to the confidences of friendship; and on what could now rest that confidence, that inwardness of intercourse, without which friendship is but a name? There was now nothing in common amongst them:—it was, perhaps, easier for each side, that all intercourse should cease, than that the former should be preserved, when the spirit was fled.—So Rhoda reasoned.—But this reasoning, which might have satisfied the under-

standing, left the heart forlorn. From what source had arisen that difference of opinion, and of feeling, whence such painful consequences had ensued?

Rhoda sought to persuade herself that this cause did not lie in any defect in her moral sense, in any deviation, on her part, from the straight line of rectitude. She tried to say something of "ignorance of the world"—of "judging by parts"—of "not seeing the whole:"—but she could not fashion her argument, even so as to convince herself; nor could she find courage to utter any form of words, in which to condemn her friends.—Their kindness, their sanction, were essential to her self-acquittal; and while their silence so painfully spoke the suspension of both, she felt herself a criminal.

"And am I also to forfeit the friendship of Lady Randolt?" thought she. "How comes it, that those, who have hitherto been most partial to me, are the readiest to give up our intercourse?

Have they indeed loved only a creature of their imagination, and now that they know me, do they love me no more?"

Thus murmured, thus repined the self-love of poor Rhoda, at the very moment, when to all who looked not within, the triumph of her vanity seemed to be complete: but it was not alone the repinings of her own heart, which clouded the bridal days of Lady Osbourne. Her uneasiness was aggravated by the repeated enquiries of Sir James, "whether she had heard from her friend, Miss Wyburg"—"whether she wished to invite her to town"—"or whether she would like to pay her a flying visit before they returned thither?"—To all such questions Rhoda could only reply in negatives, varied and modified as ingeniously as her natural love of truth, and the necessity for concealment would admit; and she found, that through all her evasions, Sir James might see something, which he could not understand, and suspect that which he could not like:

nor were her apprehensions unfounded. The apparition, which had alarmed him at Overleigh Park, recurred to his recollection; and the suspicion of a real passion, sacrificed to an ambitious feeling, arose to disturb the happiness even of these first and most glowing days of his happiness.

"Have you not even heard from your friend Lady Randolf?" said he, one day abruptly, as the servant brought in a packet of letters. Rhoda felt relieved from all the pain of an accusation, as she cried out, "oh, here is a letter from Lady Randolf?—I knew that not even the painful scene, in which she is engaged, could make her forget those whom she had once honoured with her love." So saying, she broke open the seal, and read aloud what, had she once read it to herself, would not have reached Sir James's ear.---

"My dear Lady Osbourne,

"The papers of to-day, in announcing

your marriage, inform me of an event which is very truly interesting to me. I beg you to accept the sincere wishes or the consummation of every happiness, the expectation of which has decided the destiny of your life. Lord Randolf begs leave to offer you his very cordial congratulations. Do us the favour to make our compliments acceptable to Sir James: and believe me, my dear Lady Osbourne,

Yours, very sincerely,

"C. R."

The pang of mortification and disappointment, with which the heart of Rhoda was burning at this moment, painted itself but too visibly on her variable and expressive countenance; yet had she dared to have spoken her feelings, upon what could she have grounded them? The words "how cold!" were about to escape her; but conscience, and the candour which so conspi-

cuously marked her character, changed them into, "how true!"

"What is true?" asked Sir James.

"The expression to the feeling," replied Rhoda, with tears starting to her eyes.

"The feeling is of no very ardent kind," returned Sir James. "Lady Randolf, with all her excellencies, always did appear to me to want heart more than any body I ever saw."

"Oh, no!" cried Rhoda, "she does not, indeed she does not want heart."

"And yet she had persuaded you that she really and partially loved you! Is that a letter *from* the heart, and *to* the heart, on such an occasion as the present?"

"Yes!" said Rhoda; "it has been felt to be so, alike by the writer, and the reader."

Sir James was silent.

"Lady Randolf," resumed Rhoda, endeavouring even to herself to lessen the effect which the letter had produced,

—"Lady Randolf never says more than she means; generally less. Aggravated professions of kindness and sympathy are so common, and so disgusting, that I am sure her good taste and the truth of her feeling would alike reject them."

"I would rather think," said Sir James, "that she felt too little, than I would suppose that this letter expressed all her feeling."

Rhoda well knew that it did not: but if it did not express, it included, to the apprehension of Rhoda, all she could have desired that Lady Randolf should not have felt—grief for the choice that she had made—condemnation of the motives which had determined the choice—the destruction of the attraction and interest that they had found in each other!—Not a word upon her own situation—not a hope expressed that they might soon meet—nor a lamentation that such an event was impossible. Could she doubt but that the charm, which had bound her to Lady Randolf,

was dissolved? The letter was dated from the house of the friend, whose death-scene Lady Randolf had been called upon to attend; and hence it might have been concluded that the scene was not yet closed; but the seal and paper shewed that the writer was in mourning; and Rhoda therefore thought it probable that Lady Randolf was in town. The post-mark on the letter confirmed the probability; and yet no allusion to their meeting.

Rhoda would again have been glad to have called that unjust, which she felt to be hard. Here, however, she was not restrained from an attempt towards lessening her mortification, by in part expressing it. She wrote to Lady Randolf—she said little, but that little was sufficient to shew that she wished Lady Randolf would say more; that she would tell her whether she was in town;—or whether she was coming to town;—whether she might hope still to benefit by her counsel;—or to continue to be

honoured by her friendship?—All this she endeavoured to express with as little betraying as possible of her consciousness that she had lost a degree of her good opinion, or perhaps of her good will—but she was aware that Lady Randolf would discover that she had been hurt by the tone of her letter, and she was not unwilling that she should be sensible of this.—She had concluded her epistle with these words, "I shall be in town in less than a week, and your porter must be very sturdy, if he can prevent me finding my way to your dressing-room;" but she felt this was a boast that she should not have courage to realize.—She crossed the last sentence, and substituted in its place this simple and unfamiliar phrase, "and my first inquiry will be whether you are there also."

To be in town was indeed the only wish that Rhoda could be said to feel; for on her return to town depended the accomplishment of a project, which oc-

cupied all her thoughts, and which seemed to offer the only mitigation to that pain with which the remembrance of Byrhley and its inhabitants was now accompanied.

Her debts and her bridal decoration had consumed the whole of her own property, and of Mr. Strictland's present, within two hundred pounds.—To convert this sum into such a form as would secure its acceptance by Miss Wyburg, without any offence to her delicacy, was the subject of Rhoda's constant reflection.—Her own attention had lately been turned so much to ornament, that her first thought was to find trinkets in which to lay out the money, sufficiently modest for the taste and situation of her friend—but the thought had been checked as soon as conceived, by the humiliating recollection that Frances's pleasures did not lie in such possessions. "I will endeavour to find something that will be only useful," was Rhoda's next thought—but it

seemed to her that Frances had always appeared to possess every thing she wanted; nor could she call to mind even the expression of a wish for what she had not. And yet we have sometimes, thought she, desired that Mr. Wyburg's library had included more books of amusement—if Frances *has* a passion, *has* a wish beyond her means of gratifying, it is for books. She surely will not refuse to accept, even from my hand, what will in itself be so agreeable to her, and what cannot remind her of those parts of my character of which she is ashamed.

It was then resolved that the two hundred pounds should be laid out in books; and to be in town, to chuse, to arrange, and dispatch these books, now became the first desire of Rhoda's heart. She communicated her wishes and designs to Sir James, and she perceived that the communication gave him pleasure.

"You have not then forgotten your

friend, my dear Rhoda," said he, "though she seems to have forgotten you."

"We can neither of us ever forget!" said Rhoda, with a tone that was not lost on the sensitive Sir James.

"I must become acquainted with Miss Wyburg," said he; "she does not seem to be a common character."

Rhoda made no reply, for she did not dare to encourage a wish, that she knew it was probable would end in disappointment.

CHAP. X.

> "All greatness is in virtue understood,
> 'Tis only necessary to be good."
>
> *Dryden.*

THE immediate morning after her arrival in town, Rhoda went, accompanied by Sir James, to his bookseller; and while she was seated in the parlour behind the shop, occupied in examining catalogues, and comparing editions, the voice of Lord Randolf struck her ear.

The confusion, into which she was thrown by the sound, surprised her:—she was abashed by a sudden feeling of degradation, and wished for nothing so much as to remain unobserved. The wish was fruitless.

A catalogue, which she held in her hand, was the very one that Lord Randolf happened to want; and the bookseller observing that he should have it

the moment that lady had done with it, directed Lord Randolf's attention fully to Rhoda.

A feeling, adverse to joyful recognition, seemed for a moment to arrest Lord Randolf's approach.—Rhoda had time to say to herself, "will he not speak?" before he moved towards her, and there was a gravity even to concern in his countenance when he addressed her, that pained her heart, and the more so, as she was aware that it did not pass unnoticed by Sir James.

"I sincerely wish you joy," said he to the latter, while to Rhoda, he only said, looking at her earnestly,

"I hope I see you well?"

"Is Lady Randolf in town?" asked Rhoda.

"She is," replied he.

"May I," said she, timidly, "may I go to her directly?"

"She will always be happy to see you," replied Lord Randolf.

"Will she indeed?"—cried Rhoda,

with a tone of delighted surprise; "then I will go to her immediately."

"And leave undone the business you were so eager about ten minutes ago?" said Sir James.

"I have done all I can do now," replied Rhoda: "I am to have these catalogues and those copies sent to me. —I must take more leisure to determine what I shall finally chuse."

"Are you going directly to Lady Randolf?"

"Yes, immediately; unless I can set you down any where?"

"Oh no!" returned Sir James, with a degree of chagrin in his tone; "only recollect how soon you are engaged to call upon Mrs. Strictland."

"I will endeavour not to forget," said Rhoda, as she gave her hand to Lord Randolf. "If you are going home," said she to him, as he put her into her carriage, "I wish you would let me carry you."

"I was not going home—but it is

impossible to resist such an offer," replied Lord Randolf, and he followed her into the carriage.

Rhoda in this invitation sought a protection from a *tête à tête* with Lady Randolf; but no sooner did she find herself alone with Lord Randolf, than she repented what she had done. Her mind was so full of all she must not express, that not one thing occurred to her to say that she might utter.—Lord Randolf, for a moment, seemed to be as much absorbed as herself.—How different this from any former interview?—What had destroyed that frank volubility which had used to be between them?

Rhoda would have been for ever silent; but Lord Randolf recollecting himself almost instantly, said with a cheerful accent,

"What wise purpose could carry you, my dear Lady Osbourne, to a bookseller's shop?—I hope you don't mean to be blue?"

"Oh no!" said Rhoda; "and yet," added she, speaking as usual from the impulse of the moment, "I am sure, if you would speak truth, you think that a little additional wisdom would not be thrown away upon me."

"I do think, and I have always thought," returned Lord Randolf, "that though you may, even now, have al lthe wisdom necessary to you, there can be no harm in increasing the stock."

"I did not go there in pursuit of wisdom," said Rhoda, with a sigh; "yet I would satisfy a want, which, but for lack of wisdom, perhaps, I should never have felt; and if you will be so kind, you can assist me in gratifying it. Pray tell me what books you would principally recommend, as likely to be acceptable to a female mind, already well informed, and naturally acute?"

"Are you going to furnish your own dressing room?"

"No; indeed!"—said Rhoda, blushing; "if I were, I must begin with primers and grammar—but Miss Wyburg can dispense with the milk of knowledge — she can digest stronger food."

"Are you chusing books for Miss Wyburg?"

"I wish to do so—I would connect my idea with all that she likes or loves."

Again Rhoda sighed; and again Lord Randolf was silent; but he resumed his colloquy only as if it had been interrupted by a moment's thought how best he could comply with the desire that Rhoda had expressed.

He pointed out several authors, which he said that no female library ought to be without; he enquired what books Miss Wyburg already possessed; he entered so naturally and with so much kindness into the discussion, that Rhoda felt herself relieved from all her embarrassment, and reinstated in her own good opinion. Her consciousness and

her fears, however, returned, when the carriage stopt at Lord Randolf's door.

"Don't leave me!" said she. "I dare not see Lady Randolf without you."

Lord Randolf's look of sudden surprise called Rhoda's attention to all which these words implied; but the affectionate smile, with which he replied, and the words of kindness which he uttered, convinced her that she had not betrayed herself to an enemy.

"My dear Lady Randolf!" said Rhoda, throwing her arms round Lady Randolf's neck the moment that she saw her; "do say you love me still!"—

"Still, still, and for ever!" said Lady Randolf, pressing her to her heart. "My dear Rhoda, let this be the last moment of retrospection—let us look forward. —The first step does *not* cost all. There is a straight path before you; pursue it steadily, and all will be well."

"So kind, and yet so sincere!" said Rhoda, as she returned the embrace

of her friend. "Oh! be you my guide, and I cannot err!"

"Be true to yourself, my dear Lady Osbourne," returned Lady Randolf, "and you will need no other counsellor."

"I am resolved to make you my polar star," replied Rhoda. "You are come, I hope, to be resident in town; and you will, I flatter myself, permit me to be with you all day, and every day."

"The more you are with me, the more I shall be gratified," replied Lady Randolf; "but, I fear that you will have demands upon your time, which will too often, for my wishes, deprive me of the pleasure of your company."

"It will be my own fault if I have," returned Rhoda. "You know I have my course to begin; and except you tell me it is *impossible* to live a rational life in London, I am resolved that such shall be my life. And is it not essential to such a life, that our time should not be at the disposal of others?"

"Undoubtedly!" replied Lady Randolf. "But this first step is, I do assure you, much more difficult than you will easily believe.—It *may*, however, be made, or I would not live in London, even for the few weeks that I usually do — but it can only be done by making sacrifices;—and that, not only of things agreeable, but also of such as have a higher claim to our regret."

"Probably you may find this to be the case," returned Rhoda, "with the multiplied connections that you have, and the contradictory claims that may be made upon you—but you know, I am an unallied, unknown personage.—I make, take, or reject, the acquaintance that I like.—I may say, I *will*, and I will *not*.—I may establish that *such* is my way—and who shall have a right to put me out of it?—In these respects, perhaps, I shall be able to manage even better than my dear Lady Randolf—but when I have made myself mistress of my

time, it is she who must tell me how best to ui. "

"But what will Sir James say to such entire subjection of yourself to Lady Randolf?" said Lord Randolf. "In your boasts of independence, you seem to have forgotten at least one alliance that you have made."

"It will be Sir James's best wisdom," replied Rhoda, "to suffer me to be directed by Lady Randolf."

"My dear Rhoda," said Lady Randolf, "once for all, I must put an end to such flattery.—If I am worthy of imitation, I am still but a copy; and alas!" said she, with a sigh, which spoke how feelingly she acknowledged the truth of what she said; "a most imperfect copy. The original is in your hands, as in mine—let us strive who can catch its spirit most."

"My ambition dare not yet," returned Rhoda, "soar higher than to excellence like your's.—That I might be some-

thing like you has been a motive—a reason.—Well, you say that we must have no retrospect; we must look forward—and forward I must look this moment, for I now must be gone. Mrs. Strictland will be impatient; but I am resolved that this shall be the last engagement that I will make without considering how much better a *something* it may interfere with."

Lady Randolf smiled, and shook her head; and Lord Randolf taking Rhoda's hand, said,

"As you carried me here, you shall if you please, carry me away, for I confess that, for the last hour, I have been so irrational as to be at your disposal rather than my own—now I must resume my sovereignty."

"Why should not you both dine with us?" said Rhoda.—"But—oh no—it cannot be. We dine in Grosvenor-square; and this evening, Mrs. Strictland says, must be given to some arrangements for the future—and so it may be

—but *from* this evening, I will have the disposal of my time."

So Rhoda thought, and so Rhoda purposed, but she thought and purposed in vain. Mrs. Strictland soon convinced her of the thousand and one *indispensable* duties of society which she had to perform, within a period of time insufficient to have discharged half of them. Rhoda exclaimed in despair, "When, oh when shall I have any time to myself?" to which Mrs. Strictland gravely replied,

"My dear Lady Osbourne, would you live to yourself?—Recollect what claims the world has upon you—what your friends must expect.—Would you be so selfish as to confine such happiness as has fallen to your lot, to your own gratification?—We receive that we may communicate.—As the poet says, 'to enjoy is to obey!'—and can we enjoy alone?—Oh no, my dear; you must diffuse yourself—you are no longer

in a situation to think only of pleasing yourself."

"Of pleasing myself *only*, I hope I should never think," said Rhoda, "but if I am never to have a moment that I can call my own, I do not see how I shall please myself at all."

"Do you call it not having a moment of your own, when you give your time to your friends? As well might you say that you had not the disposal of your money, when you have laid it out in what pleases you best;—and what better use can you make of your time, than to pass it in the society, where you really receive and communicate pleasure?—There is, I think, nothing very exigent in the *bienseances* of *societé*, when they call upon us to do nothing but what we like to do."

"But, my dearest madam," said Rhoda, "we must not play all day—and every day.—There are duties—there are rationalities."

"To be sure there are," replied Mrs.

Strictland, who always admitted truth in the abstract, and never practised it in detail; "it is the *moral* of a London life so to economize time, as to make it answer all the various calls that are made upon it—and I dare say, my dear, that you will be exemplary in this respect."

"I must then," said Rhoda, repeating the lesson which she had so lately learnt, "I must then make some sacrifices."

"*Point de tout*," replied Mrs. Strictland, "nothing can be easier, with good arrangement.—Method, my dear, is all."

"And early rising and late sitting up," said Rhoda.

"The latter is undoubtedly unavoidable," said Mrs. Strictland: "the former must give way to some consideration for health. We must not wholly forget these poor mortal bodies, worthless as good people tell us they are."

"The danger of forgetfulness is per-

haps, on the other side," said Rhoda; "but we are not talking of such grave matters just now—we are rather endeavouring to crowd into the short space of twenty-four hours the greatest succession of pleasures that this world can give, than thinking of what may contribute to those of the next—but how is even this to be done, if we are always to live in such a hurry of time and thought, as at once destroys the sense of pleasure, and consciousness of rationality?"

"Can there be any thing more rational than the pleasures of society?—Is it not the distinction of man, that he is a social animal?" asked Mrs. Strictland.

"Well, but I do not see how, according to our present arrangements, I can find one day to pass with Lady Randolf at her own house; or ask her to mine, unless with so many others, that I shall have no enjoyment of her company."

"I don't see how this can be helped; and really Lady Randolf makes so little of

herself in society, that I do not think it much to be lamented.—She is admirable amidst all her duties at Temple Harcourt, but London is not her element."

"This day fortnight, however," said Rhoda, "we will have wholly to ourselves,"—writing down at the same moment these words,

"Lady Randolf's day!"

CHAP. XI.

> "Now the full town to joy invites,
> Distracted with its own delights;
> Now Pleasure pours from her full urn
> Each tiresome transport in its turn:
> When Dissipation's altars blaze,
> And men run mad a thousand ways."
>
> *More.*

But Lady Randolf's day never came. The adverse reasonings of Lady Randolf and Mrs. Strictland, if they did not hold Rhoda's judgment one moment in suspense, had very unequal influence over her conduct. She gave her wishes and her resolves to Lady Randolf's system;—her time and her regrets to Mrs. Strictland's. Long before the expiration of the fortnight, Rhoda found herself involved in so inextricable a labyrinth of engagements, that she might, with the

strictest accuracy, have said, she had not an hour that she could call her own. It appeared to her that these engagements had arisen uncontroulably one out of the other; and she believed she was not accountable for a thraldom, which she did not fail to lament in very pathetic terms, to Lady Randolf, whenever her knowledge of her friend's stationary habits enabled her to pass with her those few and fleeting moments which intervened between those indispensable duties of society in which she fancied herself to be engaged.

She was always sure to find Lady Randolf affectionate and indulgent; and when sometimes the gravity of her countenance forced reflection on Rhoda, and led her to mingle with her regrets that they could be so little together, something of self-reproach, she endeavoured to satisfy herself, and to persuade Lady Randolf, that the evil was a passing one, the unavoidable consequence of the newness of her situation; and that when the

novelty was over, she should be able to regulate her time and her life, as her reason and her wishes directed. Lady Randolf reminded her how recently she had reasoned differently; and to all her sophistry and self-delusion, replied with these impressive words—

"Now, or never!"

"It cannot be now; it will be some time," Rhoda would reply. "You will never persuade me that I shall continue a course of life which wearies me, and disgusts me, that keeps me for ever in the lassitude, or the delirium of a fever. No, my dear Lady Randolf, what I do now is only what is imposed upon me by the duties of society; they will cease with the occasion. I shall then be able to live with those whom I best love, and to do what I best like; and then, how few will be the days when we shall not be together!"

"Now, or never!" replied Lady Randolf; and Rhoda thought her the most unpersuadable of rational creatures.

But from lamenting the necessity which occupied her own time, she proceeded to quarrel with the choice that disposed of Lady Randolf's.

"Do you not think, my dear Lady Randolf," would she say, "that there are certain considerations, which for the short time that you *are* in town, might be allowed to supersede your rules of life, though they are in general so excellent, and make you so unlike, and so superior to those around you? If you would suffer your light to shine a little more generally, who knows how many might be induced to illuminate too? I am sure you know better than I can tell you, that you ought not to hide your talent in a napkin."

"Psha!" said Lady Randolf, with a smile.

"Well, if your modesty will not allow any strength in this plea, christian charity should bring you more into public. How many people would delight to see you, and to converse with you,

to whom it is quite impossible to find time to give to you individually! How many moments, and even hours, might we be together, which we now pass apart, if you would but a little more diffuse yourself! The regularity of your hours—the limitation of your engagements—the irrevocableness of your decisions, do really place such barriers between you and those who cannot do as you do, as straighten, I am sure, your means of doing good, and rob those who love you, of a large portion of happiness, which you might bestow upon them if you would."

"Might I not make a similar complaint of those who will not come where they are sure to find me?" replied Lady Randolf. "But, my dear Rhoda, have I not always told you that it is not the easiest thing in the world to have time at our own disposal in London—that to attain it, many sacrifices must be made, not only of things merely agreeable, but of

such as have a high claim to our regret? Perhaps, amongst such sacrifices, I do not always make the best selection: but as I think more of the end than the means, provided I can secure the command of my time, without doing evil to any one, I believe I must be content without lighting up any emulative fires; nor should I be reproached with burying my talent, while, such as it is, my family, my friends, my children, and my husband, have the full use of it."

"No, not your friends!" said Rhoda, eagerly.

"Yes, my friends!" replied Lady Randolf. "All those who think it worth while to seek it, where they know it is to be found, and know too that it is always at their service."

Rhoda, abashed, said, "But how is this to be done?"

"By giving up the vain hope of reconciling inconsistencies;—by submitting to the law of Nature, which forbids our

being in two places at the same time;—by being content with a part;—by keeping the end of life in view;—and by not running after every glittering bauble that crosses our path."

"But I do not know," said Rhoda, "that I could bear to live so much alone as you do."

"Alone, my dear Rhoda!—No, not alone. Do not accuse me of so suspicious a singularity, as to suppose, that in this mart of all that is good, and wise, and agreeable, I am so much enamoured of self as to prefer solitude to company."

"Why, where are you?—You go no where."

"Not *every* where, I confess; but not 'every where,' is not 'no where.' We met last night, you know."

"For a moment—an instant," replied Rhoda.

"Whose fault was that, my dear? I was at Lady W——'s a whole hour."

"I was not there ten minutes," said Rhoda. "I had so many other places to go to; and if you would have gone with me——"

"I could not have been at Lady W——'s," replied Lady Randolf; "and I was there by appointment to meet some mutual friends, whom we have seldom the pleasure of seeing."

"It seems to me that there is no enjoyment of friends in London," said Rhoda; "but there is plenty of amusement: and I wish, my dear Lady Randolf, you would share it with me, and then I should have all I wish."

"When shall I cure you of that unavailing desire, my dear Lady Osbourne?" said Lady Randolf, laughing. "*All* we wish is what we none of us can have. Selection is the great art of happiness; and when you have learned to select, you will find that there may be an enjoyment of friends, even in London."

Rhoda sighed,—moralized,—resolved, and went on in the same course.

Yet as this course was but the same which was pursued by all around her—as she saw herself the object of envy, of admiration, and of imitation—as Mrs. Strictland applauded, and Sir James smiled—as in seeking her own amusement she promoted the pleasures of others—as her heart was sensible to pity, and her hand open to relieve distress, Rhoda endeavoured to persuade herself that all was well; that there was nothing to be reproved in her way of life; and that the vacuity of her heart and mind, to which, in the momentary intervals of enjoyment, she was conscious, was the fault of her friends, rather than herself.

"How happy should I be, if Lady Randolf was more like the rest of the world!" thought she. "My heart could not be so blank, so heavy, if Frances would write to me;—and why will she not?"

It was a fearful question; and in avoiding to solve it, she trembled, lest the silence of her friend should not be the least equivocal proof that she had lost at once her good opinion, and her love.

CHAP. XII.

—————— "Slave to fame,
Vain and aspiring on the world she came."

Crabbe.

The books were chosen, and ready to be sent off; but Rhoda had not courage to give the orders for their departure.

"If they should be returned!" was the thought which haunted her night and day.

"Could I have one word to assure me that I was not forgotten, I should not fear but that I might regain my place in her affections."

But this word came not; and it was not until the moment when expectation was extinct, and hope was almost gone,

that Rhoda received the following letter from Miss Wyburg:—

"If I have not written to you during the last two months, it is not that I have not thought of you; and, if you have not ceased to think of me, you will not be at a loss to understand how the heart may be too full for utterance.

"But let the past be, as if it had never been, my dear Rhoda! The present moment is a new era in our friendship. This friendship has received a shock, but it is not overthrown;—the original foundation remains unimpaired—but let us take care, that the new superstructure, which is now to be raised, may be formed of more durable materials than was the last. Imagination must have no part in this. What I am, you know; for I am unchanged. What you are, I am to learn; but it is to you alone that I shall look for information. No one, but yourself, can ever induce me to doubt of the warmth, the sincerity of

your love for virtue—your determination to re-enter her paths—and your steadiness of perseverance in the right way. That way, my dear friend, is now plain before you. You have paid a high price for the elevated station that you have obtained: in the use of this station may be found the apology for the undue value which it has had in your eyes.

"Rhoda Strictland is no more;—let not her Frances blush for Lady Osbourne. The prayers, the kindness of my father are your's. Oh, be not unworthy of the one—nor render vain the other!—and then the peace and confidence of friendship may be again between us."

"F. W."

'Humiliated, and even stung as Rhoda was, by parts of this letter, the impression of pleasure was the paramount feeling from the perusal of it.

"I am not forgotten!—I am still beloved!—I shall regain the good opinion

of my Frances!—I shall re-conquer the esteem of Mr. Wyburg!" were the joyous thoughts, that from the buoyancy of self-love, were uppermost in her mind. Nor was it wonderful that she, who heard of her excellencies and her charms, from the rising dawn to the setting sun, should believe that she could command the good opinion of two people whom she knew had once partially loved her, and who professed to love her still.

She had a way of estimating her own merit, which she flattered herself might be adopted by her friends. The past, she was ready to acknowledge, had been faulty; but the future was to be meritorious, and she accepted as proofs of being already right, her reiterated determinations that she would be so. Already she took credit for the pleasure that would redound to her friends, from the fair fame which she was resolved to establish for herself in the course which lay before her. Now she no longer he-

sitated to dispatch the present of books. She was even impatient that they should arrive at Byrhley; and it was with a rapid pen that she thus traced the lively feelings of her mind:—

"Rhoda Strictland is not extinct;—the proof that she exists unchanged and unimpaired, is established by all that the silence of her Frances has inflicted on Lady Osbourne,—a silence that has imposed self-reproach and heaviness of heart on a period which ought to have been distinguished by complacency of mind, and lightness of spirit; but you were silent, my dearest friend, and your Rhoda was unhappy.

"Will you then say that your Rhoda is no more?—Ah, no!—she lives—lives in her regrets that you and she cannot see every object in the same point of view;—lives in the affections of her earliest days, unchanged and unadulterated;—lives in the love of all that you and your respected father ever taught her to love;

—lives in the ardent desire to excel;—and lives, alas! in the weakness of her powers to fulfil that desire! Do you not recognise your own, your unaltered, your inconsequent Rhoda, in these lines?—And if you could love so imperfect a creature in the days that are gone, why should you not love her still through the days that are to come—days that will bring with them extended power to become more worthy of your love—circumstances that will better secure her against——herself!—motives and encouragements that will make her will more operative to good than it has ever yet been. Judge not of the future by the turmoils in which I am just now obliged to live: yes, my dear, *obliged* to live. I know all that can be objected to the term, if the turmoil include any thing that I ought not to do, or if it cause me to omit that which I ought to do. I am not aware that either *is* the case; but if it were, in some *small* degree, I really could not at this moment

stop short in my career. The impulse is given; and given by motives by no means selfish. In fact, I sacrifice my wishes twenty times in a day; but the expectations of others---the necessity of not being singular, which to me, would, in so young a person, have the stamp of presumption---the duty of communicating, when I have received so largely, make it impossible, in these first days of making myself known to the world, to live wholly to my own heart, or to dispose of my time as my understanding directs. I had no notion how impossible all this was before I tried. Lady Randolf warned me of the difficulty; but nothing short of experience could have convinced me of the impossibility. Perhaps you will ask, whether Lady Randolf finds this impossibility? Certainly she does not; but Lady Randolf is already known to the world: she has made her selection of friends, and has formed around her a society reciprocally pleasing to all its members. This is

what I *shall* do, my dearest Frances; but that I may do it, I must look around me, and know well the individuals from whom my selection is to be made. I must establish myself in the opinion of the world; and it must feel my influence, or my withdrawing from it may be mistaken for chagrin, instead of being imputed to choice: and who then would follow me?---Perhaps you may call this vanity; but I rather believe it to be a laudable desire of being exemplary. That my example may have weight, I must be known to be above the vanities that I could at will adorn. Perhaps I do not make myself well understood; and I feel shackled in the expression of my meaning, lest I should seem to take too much consequence to myself, or to set too high a value on accidents, of the nothingness and evanescence of which, nobody can be more sensible than I am. But, my dear friend, you know not the strange materials which make up this world, on which I have been so strangely

thrown. You know not how much we must appear pliant to the will of all, that we may obtain an influence over any. I really propose to myself little short of perfecting a revolution in the fashion of morals. Lady Randolf, with all her excellencies, (and who is more sensible of their multitude than I am?) is a little too rigid to accomplish all the good that she might otherwise effect; and having advanced far in this path, cannot gracefully, or to good purpose, take another course. Without half her talents, with not a hundredth part of her excellencies, I may, if I will, exceed her in influence over the silly world with which I am surrounded. She withdraws from it,—and is forgotten;—I mean to live in it, and rule it. One revolution I have already accomplished: I have taught Lord William St. Quintin to talk sense!—Since my marriage he has been much with me. His manners are those of a very partial friend; but now he sees that I dislike both flattery and freedom,

I have not to complain of either. A tone may be given to society, if once we really appear to be in earnest; and as I am persuaded that it is more from heedlessness, than mischief, that three parts of the London human race live in a succession of frivolities, by which the very *material* for virtue is destroyed, I shall have nothing to do in my attempt to place society upon a better footing, than to give a new taste in the disposition of time: all the rest will follow, of course. You shall not (beyond the *present season*) hear of the numerous assemblies of Lady Osbourne; but you shall hear of our select parties, where I mean to assemble so many of the good and the wise, and the agreeable, that every body will become good, wise, and agreeable, that they may be admitted to so choice a society. I take more pleasure already in anticipating the rational pleasures of the time to come, than in all the flutter, flattery and distinction of the present hour. I *think* I should ab-

jure them instantly, did I not feel that I must establish my influence, before I can use it.

"My dear Mr. Wyburg once told me that I was born to be an example, or a warning. I hope that he will approve my determination to be the former, and the means which I take to be so. If I did desire to withdraw wholly from this gay scene, which, however, I do not pretend to say *is* the case, I could not, just now, do it. Sir James wishes me to be seen. We are always seen together; and to be seen as the conspicuous figure in every group of which I make one. I am in public often more to comply with his wishes, than my own: at least I think so; but really I can hardly distinguish the one from the other. He seems to like every thing that I like. Speaking of you, my dearest Frances, though of your merits he knows nothing but from the taste that I have for them, he says that he must know you. He was jealous of your long si-

lence, and began to think, that you did not love me enough. Could I dare to hope that, in these early days of our *new* friendship, you would confer such a favour upon me. I am sure that you could not flatter, or please Sir James so much, as by condescending to visit us. Oh my Frances, what an act of kindness and oblivion would that be! Is it possible?—You say that you have to learn what I am!—Come and see: and as a proof that you will, accept, I intreat of you, the mark of my remembrance which I presume to send you. You will receive a box of books, chosen with every attention to your taste and your studies, that my intimate knowledge of both has enabled me to exert.—Again I intreat that you will accept of this outward show of my love. Wound not my feelings so deeply, as to give me reason to believe that what I know is in itself so acceptable to you, becomes distasteful, when offered by my hand. They have long been prepared to be sent

you; but your poor, self-humbled, conscience-mortified Rhoda durst not presume to offer you any proof of her recollection, while she believed herself forgotten by you."

To this letter Rhoda received the following answer:—

"I told you, my dearest Rhoda, that I would look alone to yourself for the knowledge of what you were become. Your letter has given me this information. I recognise there all that I ever loved—all that I ever feared—all that I ever deprecated, in the heart and mind of my Rhoda Nor can I *love*, nor fear, nor deprecate *less* than I have done; Neither can I *love* more: but may not my fear be increased? May I not see more cause for deprecation? Once, this *once*, cast a retrospective glance on the events of the last seven months, and tell me, if I have cause for steadier confidence—for lessened apprehension?—

The power of doing good to others may be enlarged; but are not the temptations to do evil to yourself multiplied?—Must I not tremble at the ambitious design of regulating the world, when your solicitude for yourself should be doubled?

"May I not be allowed to doubt, that, until you can controul your own will, you are not competent to lead that of your companions?—and what am I to think of your self-possession, when you tell me that you are the subject of an impulse, which you could not resist, though it were to impel you to evil? Ah, my dear Rhoda, is not this akin to the boast of Archimedes? No doubt but you too could move a world, had you a spot whereon to fix your foot; but where is this spot?—Is it to be found in your principles---in your reason---or even in your inclination? Against them all you acknowledge is that you are at the disposal of the very persons whom you design to govern!—Is the versatile so-

phistry, which has, in the course of the eventful period that has passed since we parted, so often been called upon, to reconcile the fluctuating wishes and varying plans of my friend, any guarantee that the future shall not resemble the past?---Is a continuance in the path of error the road to truth? Your own example may be pleaded against your precepts; and to establish your reform, you will have, not only the habits of others to break through, but your own. Ah, be content, my dearest, to forego the doubtful honours of a leader in the dangerous path which you are now treading. Follow her who will conduct you safely to your end: become one of Lady Randolf's society; leave to others the task of teaching Lord William St. Quintin to speak sense, and think only how you may best establish your own.

"You will, perhaps, tell me that I know not the strange materials of which the world that you inhabit is formed. You will be doubtful that you have

not made yourself understood. Ah, my poor friend, I understand you but too well! I see but too plainly the materials of which your world is composed. Did you see them *as* plainly, my father's prophecy would rather appal, than allure you. 'When your friend,' says he, 'can regulate her own time, I will believe that she may teach others to regulate their's.' Does this sound harsh? Oh, my friend, there is nothing harsh in the feelings that dictate such words. If I speak to you at all, it must be with the voice of truth: so have I always spoken; and to speak otherwise, will consist neither with the old nor the new ties that are between us. My dearest Rhoda, I tremble for you!—Tremble for yourself, and all may yet be well. By the frequency of your letters, and by the freedom of your communications, I shall judge, my dear, whether my presence would add to your happiness. When I am persuaded that it will do so, Sir James shall have no

reason to 'doubt whether I love you enough.'

You have pained and gratified me by your magnificent present of books. I accept them with a mingled emotion, that I would not, if I could, explain to you; but gratitude, love, admiration, and regret, are some of its constituent parts. Your former bed-chamber is my library: there I can still meet my Rhoda! On herself it must depend whether we are again to meet elsewhere!

" Farewell! F. W."

CHAP. XIII.

"A soul immortal spending all her fires,
Wasting her strength in strenuous idleness."

Young.

RHODA, having thus resumed her intercourse with her Byrhley friends, and made a kind of hollow peace with her self-love, felt no check in running the race of pleasure that lay before her.—The remonstrances of Frances she accepted as well meant, and neglected as coming from one, who did not understand the subject that she had treated—from no one else did she hear a doubt that she was less than perfect—or a suspicion that she was fallible.—Mrs. Strictland applauded all that was done, and led the way in every scheme

of pleasure and dissipation, while Sir James accompanied her.—Thus sanctioned, and thus companioned, she forgot the disapprobation with which she had originally viewed Mrs. Strictland's levity of mind, and she stopt not to consider the motives that could have produced so great a change in the habits of Sir James.

"How gay you have made Sir James!" said her new friend, Lady Williams.

"He likes every thing that I like," said Rhoda.

Yet had she taken her opinion rather from the countenance than the action, she would probably have been led to another conclusion.—She could not then have mistaken indulgence for approbation; compliance for choice.—Sir James's vanity had at first concurred with her own in the constant exhibition of her lovely form, in every place where distinguished beauty is best displayed.—To hear his wife admired and himself envied, had been the indemnification to

which he had flown, for the loss of those home-born pleasures which alone belong to the union of hearts as well as hands; and of the absence of which he never failed to be reminded, by the overcast and pensive countenance of Rhoda, whenever they were alone together.—In society he saw her gay, and he endeavoured to persuade himself that she was happy—By being one of her society, he flattered himself that he made a part of that happiness, or at least, that his indulgence and complacency would in time secure him so desirable a distinction.

"She is young," thought he, "the world is new to her—were I to withdraw her from it now, she would fancy it more attractive, than she will find it.—When she knows how little it can give, she will be soon weary of it.—Next winter it will be quite another thing."—Yet he left her not without some intimation of his real wishes.

" Do you not wish, my dear Rhoda, that we could live more to ourselves?"

" Oh yes, to be sure I do—but just now it is impossible."

" Why impossible?—Why should we defer to do that which we like best?"

" Oh, I can't tell—but this season—this year—I am sure, Sir James, I always understood that you thought it best that we should be a little mad. I have so many things to see—and every body expects so much from me—and gives me so much.—We shall have more merit in giving up all this, when we have shewn how well we can enjoy it—and Mrs. Strictland, you know, would be mortified, if I were not to shew myself every where this first season."

" I think it best, my dear Rhoda, that you should do what you prefer—and if you *do* prefer a little more quiet, there is no reason to gratify Mrs. Strictland's inclination at the expense of your own."

" It is not that I prefer any thing," said Rhoda; " I only do what I must

do—what Mrs. Strictland tells me all new married ladies, who are to live in the world, ought to do the first year; and when we go into the country, it will be time enough to be quiet."

"The world has not *yet* wearied her," thought Sir James, and they kept on their course.

The repetition of the same round of amusement began a little, however, to pall upon the appetite of Rhoda.

"Another ball!" said she: "how tiresome!"

"Let it be the last," said Sir James.

"I wish it might—but while there are balls I must go. I have laid Lady Williams ten guineas that I can command more balls where there is no waltzing, than she can, where there is; and I am but one ball a-head."

"It is a worthy competition!" said Sir James, with a severity of tone and countenance that Rhoda had never observed before.

"There would be no competition at

all, my dear Sir James, if you did not so much dislike walfzing. Then we should go hand in hand---share our triumph—and all would be peace and gaiety."

"I do not particularly wish that you should share any thing with Lady Williams, but the commonest civility," said Sir James.

"Why?---Is there any harm in her?"

"None that I know, beyond what is apparent. She is one of the most dissipated women in town."

"And one, I do think, of the most innocent," said Rhoda. "I do not know a better creature. She has no disguise; her heart is always on her lips, and if sometimes a little folly runs over, there is never any thing really wrong."

"Is that Lady Randolf's opinion?" asked Sir James.

Rhoda coloured---"I don't recollect that I ever heard Lady Randolf mention Lady Williams. I suppose they don't know each other---but I see Lady Randolf so seldom."

"*Very* seldom indeed!" said Sir James.

"There is nothing that I lament so much," returned Rhoda. "I wonder how it happens—but her life and mine are the most incompatible possible, and she does not seem inclined to make any sacrifices to enable us to be more together."

"My dear Rhoda, do you make any to obtain more of her society?"

"I would," said Rhoda, "if I knew what would be effectual—and I *will*, before she leaves town; for it quite grieves me to think how little we have been together."

"Home is her natural element!" thought Sir James, recalling to his mind Mrs. Strictland's eulogium of Rhoda. "Oh no! not at least the home that I have provided for her."

Of home it is certain that Rhoda did not think with pleasure. It was there that she felt most a stranger. There was no domestic face which custom had made pleasant to her; there were no

duties that gave time a value in her eyes. There was no friend with whom to exchange the rising thought, or to share the counsel of the mind: all around had originated without her agency; all proceeded without her interference.—Her existence seemed not to date beyond her marriage—time before that period appeared not only to be gone, but to be annihilated.—There was nothing that connected the present with the past.—This newness extended itself, and was most painfully felt when applied to Sir James.---No gradations had shaded the acquaintance into the friend. When he was as a stranger to her, she had by a few magical words, exalted him into the controller of her fate, and the arbiter of her will;---but she had, yet to become acquainted with the qualities that might make him the friend she could love; and had to discover the talents that would render him the companion she could like. Beyond the

occurrences of the day they had little communication. The social meal, it is true, they still shared together; but unaccompanied by others, they met not at the domestic dinner, nor interchanged the morning salutations over the breakfast table. The protracted hour of the evening amusement detained Rhoda in bed till Sir James had breakfasted, and often till he was gone out for the morning.—When they met it was with kindness; but they met only for short intervals; they met only to say when they should meet next, to reconcile family engagements, to arrange dinner parties, and on Sir James's part, to lament that they lived so little together.

Rhoda felt the vapidness of this course of existence; but she found a present cure in the hurry, the excitation, the business of a life of unceasing distraction; and it was often rather to fly from the desolateness of home, than from a hope to find amusement abroad, that

she thus squandered her time, and betrayed her principles.

The object of adulation and of envy, wherever she appeared in public, while she charmed others, she was at peace with herself—each want was supplied, and every wish gratified—but on re-entering her doors, her spirits sunk—her self-complacency fled—her heart grew heavy, and she attributed to fatigue and languor what was in fact the soft voice of conscience, which she had not yet ceased to hear, though she refused to understand.

"Why am I not happy, and for what do I reproach myself?"—were questions, which, if not breathed in words, were perpetually recurring to the thought of Rhoda. "Sir James is kindness itself—I ought to love him. I suppose I do love him. I should be very ungrateful if I did not. I have riches, splendor, rank and consequence.—I use them but as every body else uses them.—I do nothing that is wrong—

nothing but what those do, who are wiser and better than myself.---Why then is my heart so cold?---Why am I thus dissatisfied?---It is only being tired ---yet I am never tired while I am amused---while I think of others rather than myself.---Perhaps I *do* live too much in public.—All shall be remedied next winter.---My home will not then, I trust, be a blank to me!"

Such were the reflections of the evening---the morning brought other feelings, and with the power of again flying from her own thoughts, she lost the wish of making them her best companions.

CHAP. XIV.

> "What spectre can the charnel send,
> So dreadful as an injur'd friend?"
>
> *Scott.*

Thus passed the days, the weeks, when one morning as she was driving through the streets in pursuit of some of her usual dissipations, she suddenly recollected a billet, which she had received a few days before from Lady Randolf.

"Drive to Lady Randolf's," said Rhoda. "Surely she will not be gone!" thought she. "She said that she was leaving town almost immediately---that she had called in vain at my house---that she must see me.---What could put all this out of my head? Drive, drive fast, to Lady Randolf's," repeated

Rhoda to her coachman.---The man did as he was ordered; but no speed could avail---the family was gone---the house was shut up!

"How unfortunate I am!" cried Rhoda; "how heartless rather!" added she, bursting into tears.

The footman stood waiting for orders, "where, my lady?"

"I care not—any where—no where —to the auction in Pall-Mall.---I was to meet Lady Williams there."

To the auction she went---at the auction she met Lady Williams; but neither the one nor the other could now engage the attention of Rhoda. She gazed around the room without seeing one object that was there; or she sat absorbed in thought, unconscious to any thing, but the mild image of Lady Randolf, which seemed to stand before her, and gently to reproach her for throwing away her own happiness.

"Who is that gentleman," said Lady Williams, stooping down, and whisper-

ing Rhoda, " who has been contemplating you for the last five minutes with the most earnest attention?"

Rhoda looked up—her eye met that of Mr. Ponsonby---she felt that she became instantly scarlet; and the effort, with which she suppressed the almost uttered exclamation, nearly choked her.

" That glance has killed him," said Lady Williams, " whoever he is---or has made him fly the field. He is off like an arrow out of a bow."

" Nonsense!" said Rhoda.

" Ah, my dear Lady Osbourne, and so the secret is out at last!---It is the friend in the corner who makes you so cold and so indifferent to all the fine things that are said to you---that throws Lord Domville into despair---and makes even Lord William St. Quintin circumspect."

" I should rather think it is that I am a wife," said Rhoda, with a grave and displeased tone.

Lady Williams laughed---profligately

laughed. "Come, come, my dear; it is a little too late to play the novice—at least to me.—You know as well as I do, that it is being a wife which makes half your attraction—or at least, that removes the obstruction of your admirers yielding to it.—With all this caution, Lord William is a very altered man in his attentions to you, since you were married."

"As you pique yourself on saying all you think," said Rhoda, in the same repulsive accent, "I wish that, upon some subjects, you would endeavour to think more laudably."

"Poor love!—Come, don't be peevish—yet I know how to allow for the irritation of the moment.—How could he be so indiscreet as to shew himself, and so unexpectedly?—But be easy—your secret is safe."

"I have no secret," said Rhoda.

"No, no!—We have none of us secrets—why should we, when we never do any thing that is wrong? But where

is the wrong to pity the sorrows which you have refused no doubt to cure."

"Is your carriage here?" said Rhoda, "or shall I set you down?—Or if you like to stay longer, I will send my carriage again after it has taken me home."

"Oh no, we will go together.—I am as tired of this place as you can be—it is no place for confidential chat—but I am sure," said she, in a coaxing tone, "that when we are alone, you will tell me all."

"I have nothing to tell," said Rhoda.

"Then I will tell you," replied Lady Williams. "This is the country lover, who put to flight all that host of slaves which surrounded you at Overleigh Park last winter—who so long held the balance between love and ambition; and who, though he lost the hand, still retains the heart. Now, is not this the veritable history of the whole matter? Deny it if you can—and what is there in it that need distress you, make you

angry with me, or blush for yourself? — Trust me, my dear Lady Osbourne, it is an every day story—what every body would do in the same circumstances---and what half, yes, the third part of the happy and discreet wives, in this gay town have done."

Rhoda was now dissolved in tears, and bowed down with a sense of shame, that would not suffer her to utter a word.

" My dear, sweet, lovely friend!" said Lady Williams, wrapping her arms round her, " this is really too childish. What can all this mean?---This is not the way in which we manage these matters in London.---We know our own minds better, and never cry for shed milk."

" I do not cry for shed milk," said Rhoda, indignantly; " but you know, Lady Williams, this is a manner of talking that I don't like; and I will not bear it."

" Well then, it shan't have it," said Lady Williams; " it *shall* be a good

child, and make all this naughty world good too, by shewing the way.---But come, wipe away your tears, or these red eyes may tell a tale that Sir James had better not hear."

"Good morning," said Rhoda; "pray make what use of my carriage you please.---I shan't want it again to-day."

"We meet at night, I hope?" said Lady Williams.

"I think not.---Good morning."

"Stanhope-street," said Lady Williams to the footman, re-settling herself in the carriage, and returning to humming an opera air.

Rhoda went directly to her drawing-room, and throwing herself into a chair, remained in such profound and sad meditation, that she heard not the step of Sir James, until his voice, in an alarmed and tender accent, reached her ear.

"My dearest Rhoda, what can be amiss?"

Rhoda raised her eyes, swimming in tears, and said with a tremulous voice,

"Lady Randolf has left town, and I have not seen her."

"Is that all?" replied Sir James. "My dear Rhoda, is it not a little childish, so deeply to lament what you seemed so little to prize?"

"It is my fate!" said Rhoda, with a burst of grief that shocked and astonished Sir James.

"What can all this mean? How can such a trifle discompose you?"

"It is ingratitude—it is heartlessness---it is folly in every varied form that I lament," said Rhoda; "and do you call these trifles?"

"You consider the matter too seriously," said Sir James; "I do not acquit you of a little inconsequence—a little heedlessness---a little inattention.---But you are incapable of ingratitude---you are not heartless.---Write to Lady

Randolf. I will engage that she will acquit you of all such offences: but perhaps she may add a little of her mind, and recommend the past as a lesson for the future."

"The past is irreparable!" said Rhoda.

"No, no," cried Sir James, with great good humour: "this season, you know, was to be our Saturnalia: the next, every thing will be in order."

"I care not how soon this season ends," said Rhoda.

"Nor I either," said Sir James. "Shall we leave town immediately?"

"With all my heart," replied Rhoda.

"And we will go," said Sir James, with a smile, as if he were sure of the pleasure that the proposal would give—"we will go to Byrhley."

"Not for the world!" cried Rhoda.

"Not for the world!" repeated Sir James.

"I would much rather go to Temple

Harcourt," said Rhoda. "Until I have made my peace with Lady Randolf, I really can have none with myself."

Sir James looked as if he could not understand all this; and as if he feared that it could mean nothing good.—

"From whence can arise your repugnance to visiting your best friends?" said Sir James.

"No, not repugnance," replied Rhoda; "but at this moment I would rather see Lady Randolf, than any person in the world."

"Well, then, write to her," said Sir James; "and say that if she will give us leave, we will be with her in a few days, and stay with her—how long shall we stay with her?"

"Let circumstances determine," returned Rhoda. "Perhaps I have lost all credit with her; perhaps she loves me no longer."

"Then," said Sir James, with a scrutinizing look, from which Rhoda always

shrunk abashed, "then your offences must be of a much deeper dye than I am aware of."

Mrs. Strictland, at this moment, entered the room. She heard with astonishment and chagrin, of the sudden annihilation of all her plans for the occupation of the lengthened period which she had designed to retain Rhoda in town. She wondered—she questioned—she conjured—she flattered: but from Sir James, she could only get, "Rhoda is tired of town;" and from Rhoda, "My dear madam, I do *so* want to see Lady Randolf!"

"And care little how soon you lose sight of me?" said Mrs. Strictland, in the most sentimental tone.

"Oh, no, no!—You know that is *not* the case," said Rhoda; "but I shall see you again very soon. We shall return to town. Shall we not, Sir James, on our road to the sea?"

"If you persist in your resolution,

not to go into Staffordshire," said Sir James.

"I have made no such resolution," said Rhoda, colouring. "We will talk of that hereafter: but as we shall not remain all together till Mr. Strictland leaves town, as we once proposed to have done, I should like to return hither from Temple Harcourt, and have another look at my kind friend here; and who knows but that we may persuade Mr. Strictland to be of our party to the sea?"

"That's my dear Rhoda!" said Mrs. Strictland, kissing her cheek; "that's like your own dear self."

Sir James did not look quite so well pleased with the proposition, and only said,

"Upon these terms, then, I hope Mrs. Strictland will not reproach us any more, for leaving this noisy town."

"Upon these terms," replied Mrs. Strictland, "I will not reproach you for any thing, with one little condition an-

nexed, however,—that we make the best of the time which remains to us, while you are in it."

"We cannot be too much together," said Rhoda; "but let it be at home. I am really so tired of the bustle I live in, that I do not intend to go out any more into public."

"The resolution is very sudden," said Sir James, again examining Rhoda's countenance, until her eye sunk under his.

"More sudden than irrevocable," said Mrs. Strictland; "as this evening will shew. My business here is to know at what hour you will call for me: it must not be early. There will be nobody at Lady Morris's before twelve."

"I have said that I shall not want my carriage any more to-day," replied Rhoda.

"No matter," returned Mrs. Strictland: "then I will call upon you at a quarter before twelve; but have you no earlier engagements?"

"If Rhoda is really tired," said Sir James, "she had better not go at all."

"Pray, my dear Sir James, don't encourage her to be so absurd," said Mrs. Strictland. "Nothing gives a young lady worse *ton*, than breaking her engagements — nobody knows why: there is always some ill-natured cause or other assigned. I am sure that Rhoda would not like to be talked of in that manner."

"Oh, certainly not," said Rhoda, terrified with the thoughts of what Lady Williams might say. "I had better go;—I would rather go."

"Always reasonable — always persuadable!" said Mrs. Strictland, tapping Rhoda's cheek. "If I did not know that you hate what you call flattery, I would say that you have no equal.— "Well, shall I call upon you; or will you call upon me?"

"I will call upon you," said Rhoda, languidly. "If I must go out at all, I have more engagements than Lady Morris's, that I must not break;—and then

we have a thousand people to dinner!—Oh, what a life is this!—I will write my letter to Lady Randolf, and escape from it all."

Rhoda found a moment in which to do this, in the following terms:—

"Your worthless Rhoda throws herself again upon your mercy. Your heart can never feel the pang which rent mine, when I drove to your door this morning, and found that you were gone!

"I should be more miserable than I am, if I did not know that your gentle nature can never hate me, as I hate myself: there is nothing that I detest more, except this vile town. I can breathe in it no longer; and Sir James, always indulgent to my wishes, consents to quit it immediately. May we come to Temple Harcourt? There, if any where, I can be reconciled to myself;—there only, can I receive absolution for the past, or be taught wisdom for the future. Yet

I feel how presumptuous, how selfish it is, to break in upon your domestic pleasures—your domestic duties, at the very first moment of their removal: but you know how to enlarge their circle; and you think yourself most at home, when you can communicate most happiness, and teach most virtue. Admit me, then, as one of your family, for a week—a few days. I will not intrude a moment beyond your wish. Take me once more under your tuition; and if I a second time fail to answer to your care, cast me off for ever as incorrigible.

"Your's ever, RHODA."

CHAP. XV.

"Dost thou think in time she'll let instruction enter where folly now possesses?"

Shakespeare.

RHODA, having by this act of contrition and acknowledgment, eased her mind of part of the load that oppressed it, and having, as usual, drawn upon the future to supply the wants of the present hour, soon lost the acuteness of her morning feelings in the occupation of the dinner hour, and the dissipation of the evening.

With Lady Randolf she already felt herself at peace; but the apparition of the auction room still haunted her imagination, and terrified her conscience.—On her entrance into every successive assembly she cast a fearful glance around in search of him, whom had she seen

the sight would have driven her from the place;—but these were scenes where the object of her terror was not likely to appear; and the conviction that he was not, by degrees restored her self-possession; and with this command she succeeded in persuading herself, that the emotion which she had felt, was nothing more than surprise at so unexpected an appearance.—She repeated to herself every moment, " that she had nothing to wish,"—that " Sir James was the kindest of husbands,"—that " if she was not happy, it was her own fault,"—that " she was a happy woman;"—and she reiterated the assertion with a sigh; —yet she was conscious that the absence of Sir James never gave her pain; that it might be protracted until she forgot him; that his conversation neither amused nor instructed her; that she had no void in her pleasures although he did not share them with her;—no want of communion with him;—no wish for an interchangement of thought:—in a

word, she was conscious that the electric spark of love was wanting, which annihilates all individual interests, and makes of two distinct beings *one.*

"But this is the case with every body, I am told"—thought she;—"it need not have been the case with me, however.—Well, I have taken what I believed I preferred—let me enjoy it then." And again she plunged into what she called pleasure;—"but the period will be short," thought she, as her heart reproached her for the means which she took to indemnify herself for the mistake she had made;—"better feelings, wiser nostrums will arise from the conversation of Lady Randolf.—Happy Lady Randolf, who has all that the heart can love, or the fancy can desire!"

But it did not appear that this conversation was likely to be soon in her power—the first possible day that she could have had an answer to her letter was gone.—Well, it was not likely that Lady Randolf would write the very

first possible hour: she did not deserve such attention;—but the next day passed, and no letter arrived.—"Lady Randolf might be from home."—On the third day she could only repeat the same supposition; for unkindness or resentment, on the part of Lady Randolf, she could not suppose. How then could she account for the blank of the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth days that came and went, and brought her no letter from Lady Randolf?—Her very soul was fretted.—She could see no supposable cause, to exclude that which she could not bear to admit.

"It was impossible," she said, "that it could be displeasure; and yet she could not see what else it could be."

Sir James, who had no self-reproach to make, could see things in a more rational view.—He could suggest many reasons for the delay of an answer to Rhoda's letter; but none that did not seem to put an end to this project of a visit to Temple Harcourt.—The silence

of Lady Randolf declared her absence from the usual place of her residence; and again Sir James mentioned Byrhley as a substitute.

"I must see Lady Randolf, if possible," said Rhoda; "we will think of Byrhley later in the year."—For Rhoda shrunk with a dread that she could not overcome, from re-visiting scenes and renewing impressions, that she feared it would be so inimical to her peace to remember.

But to see Lady Randolf at this time, proved to be impossible:—at length the much wished for letter came.—It was written with a kindness, a warmth of affection, and a sincerity of regret, that charmed and melted the heart of Rhoda; but it was written from Edinburgh, where Lady Randolf said that she was with her whole family on their way to pass their entire summer at an estate of Lord Randolf's, in the north of Scotland, which had long wanted the attention and superintending care of its proprie-

tor.—When they should be again at Temple Harcourt, Lady Randolf had it not in her power even to conjecture with any probability, as they had some thoughts of passing the early part of the winter in Edinburgh, where both she, and Lord Randolf had many connections and friends; and where they were led to believe that they should find a society very much to their mutual taste."

Rhoda, accustomed to look to others for that strength, which she ought to have sought within herself, when she thus found Lady Randolf's supporting arm withdrawn, felt as though she were undone—as though her resolutions—her principles—her very wishes, were at the disposal of any body, rather than herself."

"My dearest Rhoda," said Sir James, "do not look so like a despairing Niobe, —you see how vain were your fears of Lady Randolf's displeasure, or her coldness.—Never did I read a letter that

breathed more the very soul of friendship. I scarcely thought that Lady Randolf could so have felt. Your heart must be at ease on that point; and surely a visit to Byrhley would be no bad indemnification for the loss of Temple Harcourt."

"I *cannot* go to Byrhley yet"—said Rhoda, "with the extremest earnestness"—and her whole soul was at the moment upon her lips;—"and what shall I do without the guiding wisdom of my dear Lady Randolf?"

"You astonish me!"—said Sir James. "How can Lady Randolf's wisdom, which you suffered to remain so inactive while she was in town, be so necessary to you now?"

"Don't reproach me!"—said Rhoda, bursting into tears,—"I cannot bear to be reproached—by you."

"Reproach you, my dearest love?" said Sir James caressing her;—"my heart is incapable of reproaching you,—but in

thus mistrusting your own powers you reproach yourself."

"I have but too much cause!" said Rhoda.

"Trust me with the cause then,—said Sir James. "Have you no reliance," added he smiling, "upon *my* wisdom upon *my* counsel?"

"Oh the greatest," replied Rhoda; and the coldness, that came over her heart at the moment, did more towards stilling the tumult within, than either her reason or prudence had been able to effect.

"Well, what, then, is this mighty business?" said Sir James.

"Oh, nothing! nothing!" said Rhoda, "no specific thing—but I am a baby, and Lady Randolf manages me better than any body,—and to have her so distant—and distant for so long a time!"

"Don't let Lady Williams supply her place, and I am satisfied," said Sir James.

"Lady Williams!"—said Rhoda,—"Lady Williams is a wicked woman. Our intimacy is at an end."

" What am I to think of so many sudden revolutions of opinion?" said Sir James.

" That you were right and I wrong," replied Rhoda. " She is what you called her, a dissipated woman, and I think an unprincipled one—I am sure she is an invidious observer."

" *You* may despise her malice, I am sure"---said Sir James, with one of his formidable looks.

" I would rather be beyond its power,"---replied Rhoda.---" I wonder how I could ever like her for a moment.---I never thought her wise---but she pretended to be so fond of me, and was so profuse of obligingness. She is, however, not worth talking of.---I have done with her, unless as the most common acquaintance. And now that we cannot go to Temple Harcourt, what shall we do?---Shall we remain in town, as Mrs. Strictland desires---or go directly to the sea?"

Sir James was silent; he continued to consider Rhoda with so peculiar an air that she felt herself blush.

"My dear Sir James, what are you thinking of?" said she.

"I am thinking, Rhoda," replied he, "that I do not understand you."

Rhoda blushed a deeper tinge:

"Yet you might know," returned she, "that I am a creature governed by the impulse of the moment;---that my impressions are more vivid than lasting.---When I found that I had suffered Lady Randolf toleave town without seeing her, I really felt as if I deserved to be burnt; but you see that she thinks I may be purified without fire, and I begin to think so too.---Then the disappointment of not going to Temple Harcourt struck me to the heart:---but you say truly, while I preserve Lady Randolf's affection, this ought to be a slight grievance. All this has changed my desire to leave town in such a hurry; but nevertheless, it has no delights that it would pain me

to forego; and whether you prefer to stay, or go, I am sure I shall like that best, which you do.---Do you now understand me?" added she, laying her hand affectionately on Sir James's, and smiling as she looked up to him.

"I do! I do!" cried the enraptured husband, and clasped her in his arms. The result was, that they should give another fortnight in town to the wishes of Mrs. Strictland, and that they should then go to the sea.

The sea was the object, which at this moment had seized upon the imagination of Rhoda.---She had never seen this element on a greater scale than that which the river of her almost native Staffordshire exhibited.---Of the sublimity of the ocean, she had formed an idea which she could compare to nothing but eternity,---as unknown, as boundless!---She conceived that it must itself offer a succession of pleasure and interest, that would make all other resources for amusement superfluous, if not im-

pertinent.—She heard with a kind of contemptuous wonder, of the balls and parties that formed the delights of a sea-bathing residence.

"I shall want nothing but the sea," said she.—"I am tired of balls and parties; I fly from, rather than seek them."

"We will go," said Sir James, "whenever you like best. With you I shall have all the world."

Rhoda could not define the feeling that these words excited :---she wished not for gaiety—she wished not for exhibiting, nor its attendant flattery,—she was satiated with all.—Quiet freedom, and the sea, bounded the inclination of the moment :—but there was a damp in the thought of a *tête-à-tête* with Sir James, that chilled all her ardour to enjoy them,---she felt as though she were to be delivered into the power of a stranger.—She had in vain tried all her rhetoric, aided by the more energetic remonstrances of Mrs. Strictland, to prevail upon Mr. Strictland to be of the

party.--He had positively and inflexibly refused.

The expensive part of the London season was over—but he felt that Mrs. Strictland had made it much more so than customary---and to economise was now his main point.—No where could he exist so cheaply as in his own house in town, until the period when the approach of winter would again open to him the country residences of his acquaintances. In London, therefore, he was determined to remain, should nothing *advantageous* offer to tempt him from thence; but in no case would he incur the ever reviving expences of a sea-bathing place.—Sir James had seen Mr. Strictland's immovability with much satisfaction; and he heard Rhoda's declaration that she was tired of balls and parties, with still more.—Had her ideas of the fullness of society accorded with his, he had been the happiest of men;—but the silence, with which she received the testimony

of her all-sufficiency, shewed that it had not awakened in her heart any correspondent feeling.—Sir James felt the disappointment; but he might have felt also that he had no right to be disappointed;—he had purchased the consent of Rhoda, but he had not won her heart: and of this he was not unconscious;—all that he dared to hope was, that no one had any influence there, and that time might establish his own. The experience of his married days had hitherto tended to confirm this hope:—he had seen her surrounded by adulators—distinguished by the most pointed gallantry---assailed by the most insidious attention---but he had seen her pass through the fiery ordeal, unscorched---he had seen her repress even the hitherto unrepressible audacity and unshapable self-possession of Lord William St. Quintin—so that with her his manners were always respectful—and his conversation, though gay and familiar, untinctured by impertinence and unmarked by particu-

larity;---yet, on her part, there was nothing affected, or that spoke a consciousness of the admiration which she attracted.---Gay, open, frank, discriminating, and impartial, she rather repressed all hope by her indifference than discountenanced it by her disapprobation.---Never, until the fatal morning of the auction, had Sir James had the slightest shadow of suspicion that the heart of Rhoda was not as open to him as her countenance:---if he had not found his own image there, he was assured that no other usurped his place; while in the complacency and gratitude of Rhoda, he believed that he beheld the symptoms of a growing affection, which leisure and a more domestic intercourse, would ripen into love.---In Rhoda's enthusiasm for the grandeur of the sea, in her weariness of more busy scenes, he thought that he beheld the means of attaining his end; he had touched the chord on which all his hopes

of happiness hung:—it had returned no healthful music.

"The time is not yet come,"---thought he; "will it ever come?"---was an alarming question.---"What was the object of Lady Williams's invidious remark?" was still more so:---but as it occurred, Sir James cast his eyes on the innocent and ingenuous countenance of Rhoda, and every doubt and suspicion vanished like the thin ice before a meridian sun.

"There will be variety enough in the sea itself," said Rhoda---"let us go where we can enjoy all its beauties."

"They will be heightened by an union with those which belong to the land," said Sir James.---"The barren and treeless coast of Sussex would disgust you."

"Be the choice yours, my dear Sir James—I have no doubt but that I shall be satisfied."

Sir James would have preferred the

word happy;—but the choice in this case was not his.—It was, however, as to the place where Rhoda was to enjoy her new-born taste for the pleasures of the ocean, and Sir James decided for the Isle of Wight.

CHAP. XVI.

> "But pleasures are like poppies spread;
> You seize the flower,—the bloom is shed;
> Or like the snow falls in the river,
> A moment white—then melts for ever."
>
> *Burns.*

Here, in a little fancifully formed habitation called a cottage, "a cottage of gentility,"—on the southern side of the island,---for less than a boundless sea prospect would have cheated the hopes of Rhoda, Lady Osbourne, after a four months' matrimony, found herself in the novel situation of dependance upon her husband for the pleasures of companionship. Sir James also found dependant upon his own resources for the means to supply those pleasures. He was surprised to find them so scanty.

Sir James had the erudition of a gentleman without the inclination to communicate what he knew, or the taste, beyond the publications of the day, to increase his own fund of knowledge. His life had been spent between the society of London, and the attentions necessary to his place in the country; and this he rather respected as a possession which had passed to him through a long line of ancestors, than loved as the scene, either of his own youthful pleasures, or as the creature of his own creation. It was necessary to plant, to improve, to alter, because every body else planted, improved, and altered:—but he had not that native taste which told him what was best; nor any further pleasure from what was done, than because he had done it. In London he was more at home: its habits and its amusements were more congenial to his liking; and in the choice of company which is there to be found; Sir James had no difficulty in selecting those, by

whom he was looked up to with esteem and respect. Although he was deficient in liveliness of talent, he had good sense and cheerful spirits; and in society he joined the laugh which was raised by others, and was not conscious that he contributed nothing to the amusement himself. In the varying superfluity of topics which the vicissitudes of a London life affords; or in talking over the arrangements, improvements, reformations, and novelties, that the possession of a large fortune gives birth to, Sir James had never found himself at a loss how to bear his part well in general society; and when not in general society, he was occupied in the detail of such daily business as falls to the lot of every man who has any number of persons under him; but in a *tête-à-tête* with a young and lively female, to whom he was not an object of either hope or fear; who was not flattered by his admiration, and who considered his love as a thing of course and as her right; where there was no new call upon his kindness,

and no room for the displaying the superiority of his fortune, he felt that he must be uninteresting; and the consciousness that he was so, only increased his inability to be otherwise. He was incapable of participating in the enthusiasm that the scenes, by which she was surrounded, excited in Rhoda.—To her all was new, even life itself;—novelty with him was dead;—and while she poured out her admiration in superlatives, Sir James dealt more in comparatives.

"If we were in Dorsetshire," said Sir James, "I could shew you more beautiful spots than any that are here."

"But could you shew me the sea?" said Rhoda. "Yes," said he, "from an eminence in the park it may be seen very plainly."

"And mistaken, perhaps," said Rhoda laughing, "for a cloud. To tread its shores—to touch it—to hear it—to watch every shadow that passes over its surface—to watch every change in its ever-varying countenance—these are

the delights that the sea can give. How much I wish that Osbourne Park was washed by its waves!"

This was a wish that Sir James could not gratify; and he felt mortified that what Rhoda deemed essential to the beauties of a place, should be wanting in the home which she had received from his hand.

"I hope we shall at least find indemnifications for this *desideratum*," said Sir James. "I flatter myself that it is not a *sine qua non*."

"Oh no!" said Rhoda: "the mind itself makes its own place you know."

"But," thought Rhoda, "if the sea is not a *sine qua non*, there is something else that is. I wonder *what* it is? I have nothing to wish for, yet my heart is dissatisfied. I have tried the splendor and gaiety of life:—I am here amidst the solitude and sublimity of Nature:—while I can forget myself I am happy:—reflection brings heaviness of spirits.—This pretty cottage, the stillness that surrounds me, the command of time, the sweetness and charms of nature, all re-

mind me of my beloved Byrhley— but there I was gay as the birds that sung around me. Here I am sad: there I had a companion—a companion that gave wings of delight to every hour. Here I have——what have I?—The best of friends, I am sure; one who even lives upon my smiles!——Why should I be sad?"

Pursuing this thought, Rhoda continued to pace the pebbly shores of her favourite element, until it suddenly struck her that the conversation of Miss Wyburg was the *sine qua non*, without which every thing else was flat and without relish.

"*Here*, I should not fear to encounter the recollection of time past: my Frances would exhilarate the present, and would guard the future."

Then turning suddenly to Sir James, who was walking silently by her side,

"Would it not be delightful, my dear Sir James, if Miss Wyburg could come to us here?"

"I see that it would be delightful,"—said Sir James; "the very thought has already lighted up your eyes with the beam of pleasure;—but how does such an ardent desire for the company of your friend consist with your refusal to visit her?"

"I want her to enjoy the sea with me," said Rhoda:—"she has never seen it, its wonders and its beauties; and her's is a mind and imagination that can relish both."

"I am not the whole world to *her!*" thought Sir James.

"Write to her, then, my dear Rhoda," said Sir James; "and entreat that she will do us the favour to visit us;—but do we not ask a great deal?—The distance is great—how can Miss Wyburg make the journey alone—or even only with a female servant?—Is there any thing that we can do to facilitate the journey?"

"Oh, how I hate all this cold calculation,"—said Rhoda;—"I would have

her fly through the air to us, as my thoughts fly to her."

"But on this solid earth," said Sir James, "we must condescend to use less aerial means for our removal from place to place. Post-chaises and horses are, I confess, very mundane considerations; but your friend will find them very necessary, and even convenient. We ought to send for her; this we cannot do from hence, but she must allow us to do all we can. We must make the carriage and horses that she uses, our own. I will, myself, meet her either at Portsmouth, or Southampton, as she may appoint,—and thus have myself the pleasure of presenting to you this favoured friend, with my own hand."

Tears stood in the eyes of Rhoda.

"How very good you are to me!" said she. "Your calculations are not cold: they all tend to my happiness."

"They will, I hope, in time, make it," said Sir James.

"Oh," cried Rhoda, "how severe a reproach!"

"It was not meant as such," said Sir James: "but no more of this. Try your powers with your friend; and may she find them, as I have done—irresistible!"

Rhoda endeavoured to make them so;—thus she wrote to Miss Wyburg:—

"If I dare not appeal to the frequency of my letters, nor to the freedom of my communication, as the criterion which is to decide whether the presence of my Frances would add to the happiness of her Rhoda, I dare, at least, appeal to her own heart. She will find there an apology for any apparent failure on my part;—she will, from thence be instructed that it is the shortness of power, and not of affection, which has made me wanting, when brought to the test that she had appointed. You must have seen, by the hasty lines which from time to time I could send you, how im-

possible it was that I could write more; and you would see that though I had not time for detail, all I did say was frank and open. You will then, I hope, acknowledge that I have come up to the spirit, if not to the letter of your rule; and you will feel that without you, my happiness cannot be perfect. You will not refuse to make it so.—Have you not said, that it depends upon me when we shall meet? If it does, indeed, depend upon me, let our meeting be in the Isle of Wight—on this very spot from whence I write. I long to shew you the beauties, the grandeurs that are spread before my eyes;—beauties and grandeurs which you will so well understand, and which our beloved Staffordshire, with all its claims to pre-eminence, does not possess.

"I have anticipated all your objections—I have obviated them all. Mr. Wyburg loves you too truly, to suffer his own wishes to interfere with your's. If you wish to come to me, he will speed

you on your way. I would myself fetch you, but that would be loss of time: it must, however, in every other respect, be the same as if I had made the journey. There is nothing in it that need appear formidable to you. Let my old friend Susan attend you. I enclose your route, with the choice whether you will embark for this little island from Portsmouth, or Southampton: On which ever you may decide, you will find Sir James and myself ready to receive you, and to conduct you to a most beautiful miniature of a house, on the southern side of this fairy ground. I am perfectly enchanted with its scenes, and when I can ramble through them, your arm locked in mine, will there be any thing more to be desired for your Rhoda?— Our stay here will not, I fear, be so long as I could desire; for Sir James, I perceive, wishes to instal me at Osbourne Park. I shall not, therefore, encroach very unreasonably on Mr. Wyburg's goodness. A month at this place, and

a fortnight at Osbourne Park, is all that I will stipulate for: if more may be granted, how delightedly shall I receive the favour! Whenever you *must* return, I will myself conduct you to Ryrhley, and receive the benediction of my dear Mr. Wyburg. Oh my Frances, disappoint not this scheme of pleasure! It is the only one, of all in which I have been engaged since we parted, in which my heart has had any share. Could you comprehend how much may depend upon your compliance, you would not hesitate to oblige me. But why should I suppose that you will do so?—I am persuaded of the contrary. Come then, my dearest friend, and confound Sir James with such a proof of the power that I have over you.

"Ever your's, RHODA."

Rhoda again counted the hours which must pass before she could have a reply to her letter, but not with apprehensions of a second disappointment. She knew

that Miss Wyburg had no other home than Byrhley;—that within its narrow precincts lay all her duties, and all her pleasures. Her flights from its sheltering roof were those of the parent bird, who keeps her offspring in her eye, while she ventures abroad to seek their food. She could calculate almost the very hour at which her letter would be received: nor could she doubt the feelings it would excite, or the wishes that it would give birth to.

"I know my Frances longs to see me," said she; "and what she wishes Mr. Wyburg will grant. Objections, fears, difficulties—all will give way to indulgence. Already I seem to embrace my friend. Shake not your head, Sir James;—this day week I shall be walking on the margin of the ocean with my friend."

"If you indulge such very sanguine expectations," said Sir James, "how will you bear a disappointment, if it does come?"

"It will not come," said Rhoda.

"Frances will not disappoint me: she never did.—Did I not tell you so?" said Rhoda, receiving at the very moment which she had foretold, the expected letter, and holding it up in triumph to Sir James.

"Read it," said Sir James.

Rhoda did so, until the colour fled from her cheek and lips, and the paper fell from her hands.

"No misfortune, my dearest Rhoda, I hope?" said Sir James.

"Oh yes, yes!—she cannot come!"

"Cannot!" repeated Sir James.

"Cannot:—if it were *will not*, it would kill me quite."

"Some other time, perhaps," said Sir James.

"Read," said Rhoda, faintly, "and read aloud; for I scarcely know what I have read."

Sir James complied, and read these words:—

"Even in this hour of grief and alarm, my dearest Rhoda, the kindness of your letter, and your wish to have me with you, is gratifying to my heart. What I *could* have done, even in circumstances different from the present, I am not now at leisure to think; but *all* within my power I would have done to have complied with your wishes, and to have satisfied a longing, which two days ago, I thought was the most fervent, I could ever feel. *Now*, the dread of a severer deprivation than even that of your society, my dearest friend, concentrates all my wishes, all my hopes, the breathings of my spirit, to one point, and leaves no thought, no consciousness of any lesser blessing.—How severed—how apart do I feel that we are become, when in answer to a letter summoning me to come to you at a moment's warning, I have to tell you that my beloved parent, he in whom alone I can be said to live, is prostrate

on the bed of sickness—cast there by a seizure so formidable, and labouring under symptoms so terrific, as tell me too plainly what I must soon be!—I am not, however, alone in my sorrows. —I am not left without support, not even without human support.—A friend is with me, whose grief and solicitude for the dear object of our cares is only second to my own; and whose zeal to guard me from every evil far exceeds what I can feel for myself.—Dismiss, then, all personal solicitude for me.—All that can *mitigate*, the goodness of God already affords me.—What will not admit of mitigation, I presume to hope he will enable me to bear. While you do not hear from me, believe that I am not quite bereaved of hope—if this hope should brighten, it will be my first care to make you a sharer of it.

"F. Wyburg."

"Oh, let me be gone!" said Rhoda:

"let me fly to my Frances, assist her cares, and sooth her sorrows!"

"You do not really think of doing so?" said Sir James.

"Why not?—What dearer duty can I pay?---What more imperative debt can I discharge?---Oh, the holy wisdom of my dear Mr. Wyburg---his dying benediction would sanctify my whole life to come!"

"But you know not the danger that the nature of his complaint might expose you to," urged Sir James; "and you see that Miss Wyburg does not, in fact, want your assistance. She has a friend, whose kindness, it seems, even your's could not exceed, nor be more acceptable."

"A friend!" said Rhoda, with a sudden recollection, which restored to her pallid cheek all its bloom. "My place, perhaps, is *indeed* supplied;" added she impressively.

"You must be able to judge whe-

ther it is sufficiently so," said Sir James. "So dear a friend to Miss Wyburg, must be a friend of your's too."

"I have no friend at Byrhley, but my Frances!" said Rhoda, and burst into tears.

Sir James knew not what to think.---Again the scene at Overleigh---again the emotion of the auction morning, recurred to his memory.

"I will at least wait for another letter," said Rhoda; "I would not be unwelcome."

"*That*, my dear Rhoda, you can never be," said Sir James; "speak not so despondingly--- think not so dejectedly.---Mr. Wyburg will recover.---We must allow for the too-easily alarmed fears of his daughter. Your pleasure in her company is but delayed!---Smile upon me once again, and tell me that you think so."

Rhoda was too much overpowered with more than the illness of Mr. Wy-

burg," promptly to comply with Sir James's wishes.

"It is not now in the power of my favourite element to give me pleasure," said she.

"Then let me know your pain," said Sir James, kindly.

"Thank you; but you must let me deal with it alone I believe---it is of too complicated a sort to be understood by any body but myself."

"Why?" thought Sir James, but he dreaded being thought importunate, and was silent.

END OF VOL. II. PART II.

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